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A WILY WIDOW.

VOL. III.

A WILY WIDOW

BY

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"A MODERN GREEK HEROINE," "THE SINS OF THE FATHERS," "INCOGNITA," "THE SURVIVORS," ETC.

"Beware of the wrath of the dove."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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A WILY WIDOW.

CHAPTER I.

It was towards seven o'clock in the evening, about a fortnight later.

Eustace Warrington sat alone in the large, barely furnished drawing-room, that he had taken for his music-room, playing the violin.

Outside the westering sun shone brightly, but the Spanish blinds were lowered before all the windows, and the room was both dim and cool. A vague scent of the

mignonette, in the beds on the lawn, stole in at the windows.

Absorbed in the liquid strains that flowed from the eloquent edge of his bow, the blind man sat on a music stool playing adagio, adagio, rapt in his music. His fine, sculpturesque face wore a strange expression of melancholy, and the pensive strains seemed to fill the room with a charmed atmosphere of exquisite sadness.

The concluding chord floated out at the open windows into the sunlit air, and died into silence. The player removed his instrument from his shoulder.

'I do not know what is the matter with me this afternoon,' he said, half aloud, rising and walking up and down the room. 'It is not usual for me to be oppressed with a melancholy I cannot overcome. I wonder what time it is?'

He took out his gold repeater and made it strike. One, two, three, four, five, six: one, two, three.

'Past a quarter to seven,' he said. 'I'll go and dress for dinner. How this impression haunts me!'

He rose from the music stool, and, going to a table, put his fiddle into its case; and then crossed the room to the door. A stranger would hardly have believed he was blind. He was becoming very familiar with the place.

At dinner he asked,

'Is there any news, Frank?'

'Not much. I hear that Miss Hardwick is worse.'

'So I am sorry to hear. The rector was here for a few minutes this afternoon.'

'I saw her this afternoon, but only for an instant. She passed me in the High

Street driving in the pony-carriage. I thought her looking shockingly ill, poor girl.'

'I am very sorry to hear it,' replied Eustace; 'and that is all?' he added, as if expecting to hear more.

Warrington had nothing else to relate of any interest. All through dinner Eustace seemed *distrait*. After dinner, when they were smoking, Warrington reverted again to the subject of Miss Hardwick's ill health.

'That is a very sad thing about Miss Hardwick.'

'What is the matter with her?' asked Eustace. 'You saw her yourself. What impression did she give you?'

'I thought her looking miserably ill. Pale, and with leaden shadows under her eyes.'

'All of which means nothing to me, my dear fellow,' remarked Eustace, with a smile.

'No. . I beg your pardon. Well, she has grown very thin: seems dull, lifeless almost: tired, exhausted. I should say that she was in some sort of decline.'

'You did not hear her speak?'

'No.'

'What do they call it?'

'Nothing that I can understand. Atony: great prostration. A slight affection of the heart, accompanied by great nervous debility, I hear Gregg says.'

'Who is an ass,' remarked Eustace. 'Poor girl! It is all very sad. She is a nice girl. She has a charming little hand, too, shapely and soft, with a nervous touch; and a pretty, playful voice, with

unexpected tones in it, light laughing notes, and deeper modulations full of meaning. She should have a heart as sweet as a rose. I am very sorry that she is ill. Of course you know what is being said about it all.'

'What?'

'Different things, according as the speakers are by nature cautious or given to exaggerations; partizans of yours or of Mrs. Gainsborough's; disposed to think that Miss Hardwick has been a little silly, or that you have been very unkind to her; in fact, according to all the different shades of character and veracity of all the gossips of Lynhurst. Brutally—that you have treated her shamefully: encouraged her, and then jilted her; and finally broken her heart. Or, more mildly—that there has been an unfortunate little love affair be-

tween yourself and the lady, and that she has felt what has happened exceedingly deeply. Or, simply—that she has fallen head over ears in love with you, and is very unhappy because you do not reciprocate her passion. These are the things, at least, that reach my ears, from various people. And I suppose there is some truth in it, is there not ?'

'In the way you put it in the last case, Eustace, I believe there is some truth in it.'

'The girl has taken a fancy to you?'

'I believe she has: or really, I think I might say I know it.'

'And you?'

'Miss Hardwick is no more to me than to you.'

Eustace was awhile silent. He was

weighing not his brother's words only, but also their intonation. Presently he asked,

'Do you remember a conversation that you and I had about Miss Hardwick a day or two after you first became acquainted with her?'

'I am afraid that it has left a stronger impression upon your memory than on mine.'

Said Eustace to himself, 'Ah, he does remember it.' Aloud he continued, 'I took the liberty on that occasion to say that you would fall in love with Miss Hardwick, or something to that effect. Possibly you remember that?'

'I remember. Only it seems that instead she has fallen in love with me. Your intuition was right in the main, and wrong in particulars. Eh?'

'And you replied?'

'That I certainly should not.'

'For reasons: you remember them?'

'I remember that you gave yourself a good deal of trouble to dispute my reasons.'

'Because your reasoning was false.'

'It seems not—I think,' replied Warrington, good-temperedly.

Eustace rose and went to the open window, and standing there, with his shoulder against the wall, continued to smoke in silence.

Warrington, who had all along remained at the table, regarded him. The expression of his brother's face struck him. It was a most unusual thing for any shade of melancholy to display itself in Eustace's features; but there was one there this evening.

'What is the matter, old fellow?' asked Warrington. 'You look out of spirits.'

'I am so, rather,' admitted Eustace. 'A melancholy mood is an unusual thing with me; and when it comes depresses me a good deal. To-night I am not quite myself. This poor girl's fate weighs somehow on my mind. We came down here, you and I,' he went on, pensively, 'to make ourselves a home in this dull place: a little to husband our fortunes: a little to lead a country life: a little to be quiet. We formed acquaintances, of course; and amongst them was this young girl. They say she is pretty. I know she is charming, a brighter, gentler, finer soul than any of the rest down here. And now she is wasting, perishing away. I regret it. Something about it seems to me piteously

sad. I am romantic to-night; sentimental, what not. Laugh at me, my dear fellow, by all means.'

'No. I do not know that it is any laughing matter. Report gives the girl out to be in a dangerous way; and death is not a laughing matter for anyone.'

'I'll tell you what it is, Frank,' said Eustace, presently moving to the other side of the window, so that he had his back towards his brother. 'You might have done worse than marry that girl.'

'I am not a marrying man, and you know it.'

'I know what you say about it. But the girl is a good girl. And she will have money. And—,' this with a little more of his air of good-humour—'your place

here wants the money, if you don't want the girl.'

'Only at such a price, my dear brother, I prefer to be without the money. "*Les femmes ont trois tours de plus que le diable.*" '

'Miss Hardwick, too?'

'I suppose so. At any rate I have no wish to try.'

'I don't believe it, Frank. And,' he added, in a low tone, 'I am not convinced that you do.'

And he came back to the table.

'Are you convinced in your own mind, Frank?' he asked, sitting down, 'that this girl is suffering through no fault of yours; through no fault at all of yours? The girl has taken a fancy to you. That is on all hands conceded. You know that you have taken it into your head to have

a nasty opinion of women, and sometimes you say things that are tolerably bitter—things that might perhaps wound a girl a good deal, a girl that was fond of you.'

'I have a nasty opinion of women,' admitted Warrington. 'And, as it happens, Miss Hardwick knows I have it. But that is all beside the question. I never behaved to a woman otherwise than I would have behaved when I thought differently of them, and you know it.'

'I know that you don't intend to behave differently,' said Eustace.

'Why all these questions to-night, my dear fellow?' asked Warrington, not a little surprised at Eustace's persistency in the topic of conversation. 'What has put all this into your mind?'

'I don't know,' replied Eustace thoughtfully, as if unable to explain what was passing within him, even to himself. 'Somehow, I have it weighing on my mind to-night that we two came down here and broke this girl's peace. But I don't know what is the matter with me this evening.'

'Are you sure, Frank,' he resumed after a pause, 'that you are in no way the occasion of this girl's illness?'

'No, Eustace. I am *not* sure.'

'I do not know what you may have done, Frank. But I take it, a woman does not break her heart about nothing. And it seems that this girl is breaking her heart about you.'

'You are going too fast, Eustace,' interrupted Warrington. 'Nothing has passed between us of the sort you might imagine.

I have never knowingly given Miss Hardwick the least occasion to suppose that I cared for her. I assure you of it on my honour. And the reason is simple——because I am not in love with her : and have no intention of being in love with any woman. There have never been any reticences between you and me; and I hope there never may be. You are a shrewd reader of character. I am not, and you may know me better than I know myself. But I have never concealed from you what I have believed to be my real sentiments. I am resolved not to have anything to do with love affairs. I made a solemn vow to myself to that effect the night after I learned Violet's flight, and I mean to keep it. I don't say I will never marry; a man may marry for so many reasons. But I have done with love.

Tender relations with a woman are not my *métier*. There may be men whom women love and treat them well. I believe there are. I am not one of that sort. And I prefer to have nothing to do with people who, as I foresee, will treat me ill. Justly angry as I have been at the way my cousin behaved to me, I am able to see that what happened was, in reality, a happy escape at any rate for me; and that, had not the affair terminated as it did, both my cousin and I might have had afterwards to go through things of which I should not like to think. Having then once escaped from a life of misery, I have no wish to expose myself again to the risk of falling into it. I have vowed to have done with love affairs. I think you know me well enough, Eustace, to be sure that I am not the man either to have encouraged a

woman to love me, or to have pretended that I was in love with her when I had no feeling for her beyond that of singularly agreeable but indifferent acquaintanceship. That Miss Hardwick may have taken a greater fancy to me than prudence warranted, seems to be generally believed. That I have not been careful enough to prevent her liking me, is I allow possible. I sincerely regret it. That I have in any way encouraged her to like me, is not true.'

'Then I should say—' began Eustace, and broke off.

'I know what you would say, Eustace: and I say the same to myself. The mere fact that the girl may have conceived a liking for me, and have been disappointed not to find her affection reciprocated, is not enough to account for her breaking her

heart about the matter. And the people who believe she is breaking her heart about it are, as it seems to me, justified in suspecting that there is something unknown in the background—or, plainly, that I have been trifling with the girl. But I have not. I have had my lesson about women, at least, as far as I am concerned. I don't grumble about it: I accept it. Life cannot give everything to everyone of us. It has given you many things, and not sight. It has given me many things, and not to be able to get on with women.'

'That theory is tenable. Life has its disappointments and also its compensations,' observed the blind man, philosophically. 'It may have in store a compensation for you.'

'Let us hope so.'

'If you did find yourself some day in love with a girl, Frank?' proposed Eustace.

'I should do my best to cure myself of it, and certainly get out of her way.'

'But supposing that you had reason to know that she was in love with you?'

'I should still do the same.'

'We are accustomed to be plain with each other, Frank,' pursued Eustace, after a moment's thought. 'Suppose it was evident that this girl Miss Hardwick was in love with you: and suppose conviction was forced upon you that you were in love with her: and taking further into consideration that the girl has a pretty fortune, that she is a charming girl, and that she is possibly making herself very unhappy about you: then?'

'I should still do the same,' replied Warrington, firmly.

A shade of disappointment crossed Eustace's face, but he said no more. He left the table, and sat down on an arm-chair by the hearth, and a long silence followed. Eustace's cigar went out, and he threw the end away, and sat musing with his brow rested on his hand.

Frank Warrington still remained where he had the whole time been, at the table.

'You seem really to have the dumps very badly to-night,' he remarked at last.

'I have. I am uncomfortable, and I do not know why. At least, that is not quite true. The fact is— Well: it is foolish to talk about dreams, and it is more foolish

still to believe in presentiments. And yet I have had a dream that has had upon me all the effect of a presentiment; and I cannot shake it off.'

'Well. Let us hear all about it. I am a little curious to know what sort of thing a blind man's dream can be.'

Eustace smiled, and rousing himself a little said,

'As foolish as any other man's. But, if you wish it. You must know then that I fell asleep after luncheon, on the sofa in the music-room, and I had a singular dream. I dreamed that you and I went to see Miss Hardwick; to see her, not to inquire after her. Well, when we got to Cliff Cottage, we found the place neglected and ruinous. It was years since anything had been done to the place, or since anyone had entered it. I felt with my cane that the mosses

and weeds had grown thick upon the walls, and the paint on the gates was many years old, and blistered off by the sun. The gates opened with difficulty, and squeaked on their rusty hinges. However, we went in. Inside, the place was all overgrown. The vegetation was rank and wild, and smelt coarse and unwholesome. The paths were covered with mosses and long grasses. The shrubs, and the brambles that had grown amongst the shrubs, had encroached upon the walks, and caught our feet as we advanced. Big boughs, two, had fallen, and even trees; and you had to lead me round them. So we made our way towards the house as we could. When we reached it we found it in the same condition as the grounds, the steps of the porch had fallen out of the level, and the weeds had pushed their way up through

the tiles, making them uneven. In the hall, the floor-cloth was in holes, and ragged. I caught my foot in it and nearly fell. In the drawing-room the carpet was worn through to the boards, and I noticed that several panes of glass in the windows were broken.'

'How the deuce did you find out that the glass was broken?'

'The wind came into the room in little puffy drafts as it does through a broken window, and I could smell the rank vegetation outside. When we sat down the furniture seemed rickety, and it was very much worn and damaged, and the upholstery was threadbare and at places torn. A thick covering of dust, too, was on almost everything, and came off on my fingers. In fact, we were in a ruinous, deserted house, untenanted for years. But

the odd thing was that there was a large party assembled. I recognised the voices of almost everyone we knew in Lynham. And of other people too. A great number came in turn to speak to me, and, whilst they were doing so, I was surprised to find myself in evening dress. I was, at the moment, speaking to one of the rector's sons, and took the opportunity of laying my hand on his breast. He was also in evening dress. In fact we were all so. Soon I heard that there was to be a ball. But it appeared that there was no room in which they could dance, all the floors were so uneven, and most of them so rotten. And there were no lights, except some dip-candles, which flared in the draught from the broken windows, and stank horribly. But—this is the real point of my dream—everybody was doing their best to appear

in excellent spirits, and to seem not to remark all the contretemps and unpleasantnesses. Some ignored them entirely, others whilst partly admitting them, with a light laugh, turned them into easy jokes. All were talking, and laughing, and jesting as gaily as possible. Only in the voice of every individual without exception, howsoever cleverly they were labouring to disguise their real feelings, I detected an undertone of misgiving which assured me that they all felt exactly what I did, a horrible oppression, occasioned by the assurance of something sinister around us, which we, each of us, were too terrified to confess. In the midst of this I simply awoke, but I found myself still under the influence of the same indefinite fear or misgiving which had oppressed me in my dream. And I have not since been able

to shake it off. But I can guess that you are smiling at me.'

'No. I am wondering what you eat for luncheon.'

Eustace laughed.

'That is the same thing, is it not?' he said. 'Only I had nothing for luncheon different from what I usually take, a few biscuits and a glass of claret. Your question is the very one I first asked myself. Seriously, however, this stupid dream has left a strong impression on me.'

After a minute he continued:

'It is puerile to believe in presentiments in the way in which the superstitious, the ignorant, and the silly believe in them; and yet I am disposed to think that in some ways our instincts are not without a real prescience of danger, the more be-

cause that would be easy to explain. First there might be a dim consciousness of something amiss in ourselves, weakness, timidity, or misapprehension; all which are dangerous things. And secondly, seeing how roughly we reason, it would be quite possible for our instincts to be affected by a number of trifling things, all of which had individually escaped the observation of our reason, though taken in the aggregate they might form a serious whole. And that is just what I feel to be passing in myself at present, a dim apprehension of instinct that gives me a presentiment of something sinister very near.'

'You have been sitting in a draught, old man, and dreaming at the same time of our tumble-down place here, and of Miss Hardwick's being ill,' said Warrington.

'Come now, suppose we have a game of chess.'

'By all means,' said Eustace, rousing himself.

So they went to the library, and sat down to play.

'What are you going to give me?' said Warrington.

'Only a bishop to-night.'

The play then began, and Frank Warrington checkmated three times running.

'I'll only give you two pawns,' said Eustace.

But he still lost the game.

'It is of no use,' he said, gently pushing the board aside. 'I am under some influence from which I cannot free myself.'

'Odd!' remarked Warrington to himself.

'For the first time in his life, Eustace's imagination has got the better of his reason.'

CHAPTER II.

Whether there was any truth in Eustace Warrington's ingenious theories respecting the possible causes of his sinister presentiments; or whether his mental disquietude was simply a case—rare with him—of that apparently spontaneous depression of spirits to which almost every one is from time to time subject (for to conceive of any occult or supernatural agency miraculously warning Eustace Warrington of dangers in the future would be absurd),

this, at any rate, is certain, that the realities which were going on at Cliff Cottage surpassed in horror all the quaint imaginations of Eustace Warrington's post-prandial dreams.

Maud Gainsborough was carrying out her resolution.

Every day Lily drank in one way or another her tiny fraction of a grain of aconite; and the drug did its work slowly and steadily. Gently it reduced her to a condition of so profound a prostration that any consequence began to appear possible, a fatal decay, perhaps a slow recovery, or even a sudden collapse.

The widow, meanwhile, watched with anxiety the effect of every dose.

Within the last few days, a new fear had presented itself. If she proceeded too rapidly she might awaken suspicion: and

she had never had any intention of proceeding rapidly. But it occurred to her now, that if she undermined the girl's life very slowly it was possible that some one would be found to declare that the climate of Lynham was killing Lily, and to propose her immediate removal. By-and-by anyone who pleased might recommend removal. Lily would die before she could be removed. But just at present it would be too early to hazard a fatal dose. So the widow, haunted with a perpetual misgiving as to what might any day occur, was doing her best to steer a middle course, to undermine the girl's life as rapidly as she dared, and yet not too fast, for fear of attracting attention.

There were moments, and not moments only, long hours, when the task that she had set herself revolted her, made her

blood run cold to her heart, and turned her face to the colour of ashes.

After she had given her cousin a dose in the morning she would go back to her own room, and, dropping into a chair, sit motionless with her head thrown down on her arms folded on the table, morally stunned. Left alone in the evening after Lily had gone to bed, she found it impossible to remain still, and tired of pacing the room went out into the garden, and thence, afraid of being noticed by the servants, down to the little, lonely beach, where, assured of not being watched, she would walk up and down, up and down, up and down by the hour, grateful for the darkness and the coolness of the sea air. And when she returned to the house how haggard she was! So haggard that she shrank from seeing herself in the glass.

At night, in spite of all the fatigue she gave herself, sleep became difficult. The tension of her nerves, constantly over-strung, refusing to relax itself in natural repose.

It was a grim, ghastly task that she had set herself in the destruction of this girl, and it taxed and over-taxed all the will and energy she possessed. But she persevered.

Externally she was still very kind to Lily; devoted to her. There had been, for a few days, a slight break in the affectionateness with which she had treated the girl on her first return from town. When her courage proved for a moment insufficient for the perpetration of the crime she meditated, her temper became uneven and disturbed, and her way with Lily uncertain, at times even brusque. But, now

that she had once more resolutely embarked on her crime, her manner recovered all its exceeding gentleness. Her attention, her kindness, and her lavish expenditure on the girl of the tenderest signs of affection were untiring.

'Poor girl,' she would say to herself. 'It is hard upon her, and I do feel for her, having to die so young. And I wish the stuff did not affect her spirits. If I knew of anything that would keep her bright and happy, I would infinitely rather use it. It makes me miserable to see her struggling with herself, to keep back the tears that come without any cause to her eyes. Poor Lily! It seems hard to believe that I am doing her a kindness, and saving her from years of pain and misery. But, after all, what must be, must be.'

That was Maud Gainsborough's motto now: 'What must be, must be.'

Dr. Gregg had resumed his daily visits. Marasmus was the last long word he had found out for what was going on at Cliff Cottage. Marasmus and a considerable affection of the heart. Maud amused herself with pretending to think he might be mistaken, and she quoted what the London physician had said. But all that only confirmed the doctor in his own opinion.

However, he began to shake his head, and to look exceedingly serious.

And well he might. Lily wasted, wasted like wax before the fire. The actual loss of vital force was slow: from one day to another there was scarcely a perceptible difference. But the girl was utterly indisposed to make the least struggle for ex-

istence, and was sinking with indifference into her grave. So far as Dr. Gregg could see, there was nothing to be done but to go on calling, putting down his visits, and giving her things that could do her no harm. She had come to have no appetite, and ate nothing to speak of; and so, for one thing, was in reality starving.

The languor and indifference that had got possession of her was astonishing. Her will seemed to be more feeble even than her strength. Now and then she was capricious, wilful even, and intractable, and would then insist upon doing or attempting to do what she chose; but, for the most part, she was merely reluctant to exert herself to make the smallest movement. Mrs. Gainsborough took her for easy drives in the pony carriage, but the drives only

tired her and made her head ache. And once she crawled as far as Lynham and back. Later, only to stand for a few minutes appeared to be a fatigue to her, and the instant she could she dropped into a chair. If left to herself, she hardly moved for hours together; and would sit a whole afternoon, almost motionless, reclining on a low lounging-chair in the fresh air by the open drawing-room window. She had again, on rising, been seized with a sudden vertigo, and had fallen twice on the floor. She began to take her breakfast in bed, and her cousin assisted her to rise, standing ready to catch her in her arms if she should be giddy.

'I don't like this giddiness on rising,' said Maud Gainsborough to the doctor, after it had occurred once or twice. 'Do

you really think that that can be occasioned merely by general debility, and a slight affection of the heart?'

'Certainly. In these cases there is very often a certain degree of giddiness on first awaking; not always. And, as for the affection of the heart, feel for yourself; see how abnormal and irregular her pulse is.'

It was so certainly, a rapid pulse, small and soft and irregular.

Some days she appeared much worse. Then the widow the next morning diminished even the small fraction of a grain she usually gave her. When Lily recovered a little, she returned to the usual dose, but never exceeded it.

At the end of about ten days an incident occurred of a graver character. Lily was in miserable spirits, and had been crying

in the morning. Now in the afternoon she was sitting under the verandah, a piteous picture of exhaustion. Maud was doing some fancy work, and presently put it down to look for her embroidery scissors which she had mislaid.

'I know where they are, Maud. I saw them upstairs. I'll go and get them for you,' said Lily. And she made a movement to rise.

'No. You stay where you are, dear. I'll get them,' replied the widow.

But Lily wished to go, and when her cousin would have insisted, became cross. At times the depression from which she was suffering reacted a good deal on her temper and judgment, and made her unmanageable and petulant.

'I'm not so ill that I cannot go upstairs,' she said now. 'Goodness knows I am

weak enough without your wanting to make me out still worse.'

And with that she rose and went to fetch the scissors, her cousin not caring to thwart her.

The widow waited three minutes, five minutes; and Lily did not come with the scissors! Maud Gainsborough rose and went upstairs after her.

She found her lying on the floor of the landing, supporting her head on her hand, and panting for breath.

She had run upstairs, not quickly, and on reaching the top her breath suddenly failed her; she could not say whether she felt exactly dizzy or faint, but she had sunk on the floor, just as she was. She explained it all, drawing her breath with some difficulty.

Maud put her to bed. And the next

day gave her no dose, and the next only half a dose. She had not relented, but she believed that she had reached a point where, if she did not mean to cut the matter short, she must allow her patient an interval of repose.

So for a few days Lily grew no worse. She even improved a little. Too little for Dr. Gregg to perceive, but not too little for Maud's watchful eyes to notice.

One of these days Maud would have had her take a drive, but Lily declined. She would rather walk in the garden. The widow, feeling tolerably secure about her for the present, left her therefore, and went out to pay some calls. When she was gone, Lily changed her mind and took it into her head after all to go for a drive. Why not? She would have the pony carriage and drive into Lynham. So

she gave the order and went to dress.

When the carriage came round, she set off gaily enough. The tiny excitement had given a fillip to her spirits. She drove into the town and did some shopping, and then turned towards the parade.

In the street she passed Warrington, walking slowly in the direction of Lynhurst. A sudden flush suffused her face, followed by an equally sudden pallor. The most trifling emotion now made her flush or pale. She reached the parade and drove twice up and down, and then turned the ponies' heads homeward again. The encounter with Warrington had put her out of humour with her drive.

CHAPTER III.

Eustace Warrington was in the town that afternoon. He had walked in with his brother, but remained behind him to attend to some affairs of his own. He had grown quite familiar with the whole place, and rather liked to be left to go about like the rest of the world. There was something indeed a little strange in the spectacle of this man of educated appearance and gentlemanly dress occasionally feeling his way with his cane along the kerb, like a

blind beggar. But it was only here and there that Eustace was reduced to this expedient, and he took a pride in being independent.

Only presently, crossing a street which he had assured himself by his ear was clear, he was suddenly startled by the sound of some vehicle approaching at a very rapid pace. The vehicle was, in reality, a butcher's cart without any driver. Some boys had entertained themselves with scaring the horse, whilst it was waiting at a gate, and the brute had bolted. Now it was coming down the street in a zig-zag way with the empty cart rattling noisily behind. The sound, coming first from one side of the street and then from the other, perplexed Eustace, who was near the middle of the road, and he stopped, aware that the driver, keeping on the left of the

road, should pass behind him. The next instant the noisy vehicle was upon him and at the same instant that some one called out to him in words he could not understand, he sprang back, just in time to escape being run over, but not in time to escape being knocked down.

The box of the wheel struck his knee. His leg gave way under him, and he fell, and the horse and cart passed on.

A little crowd gathered round him; the chemist from over the way, and several other shop-keepers, and the man who had called out, and some passers by.

Eustace's knee gave him great pain; and he was unable to rise. Three men took him up gently, to carry him into the chemist's shop.

'Send word as quickly as you can to my

brother,' he said. 'He has gone home to Lynhurst.'

At the same instant Lily drove up, and, seeing the crowd, stopped to inquire what had happened.

'Blind gentleman run over, miss.'

A sudden horrible fear smote Lily's heart. Mr. Warrington was so attached to his brother.

'Is he hurt?' she asked, breathlessly.

'It's Mr. Eustace Warrington, miss,' answered another man standing near. 'He was not run over; only knocked down; but he has hurt his knee.'

And, whilst he spoke, Eustace, carried in the arms of the men, in her hearing repeated his request.

'Send at once to Mr. Warrington at Lynhurst.'

'Tell Mr. Eustace Warrington that I

just now passed Mr. Warrington, and that I will drive after him and send him back,' said Lily to the man who had spoken to her. And, giving her ponies a flick, she drove off at a sharp trot in the direction of Lynhurst.

Warrington had walked on slowly. He was not a mile out of Lynham when he heard a trap coming along the road behind him.

A minute later Lily suddenly drew up short at his side, almost throwing her ponies on their haunches.

Warrington stopped, regarding her with surprise.

'Mr. Warrington: I beg your pardon,' she said, hurriedly: 'But Mr. Eustace Warrington has met with an accident; not a serious one: and he is asking for you: he is at Campbell's the chemist in New Street.'

How it made her heart leap to be again speaking to this man! The blood had rushed into her face and scalded her cheeks, but she could not help it. All the way she had been in a flutter of agitation, thinking of what she should say, wondering whether she would overtake Warrington, and really once more speak to him face to face, assuredly for the last time; and for once be able to do him a tiny service. Now that the moment was come, and that he was here listening, with his dark eyes fixed on hers, the reality surpassed her anticipation.

He had raised his hat to her as she spoke. Now he asked, anxiously,

'What has happened?'

'Mr. Eustace Warrington was crossing the road, and was knocked down by a cart. I came up immediately afterwards. He

was asking for you, and I drove on at once. I believe there is no occasion for any serious alarm, but I heard that he had hurt one of his knees.'

'I am extremely obliged to you: I really am extremely obliged to you.'

He spoke hurriedly, a little embarrassed as it seemed, and again raising his hat, turned to go back to Lynham.

'But, Mr. Warrington,' exclaimed Lily, turning on her seat, for he was already striding away, 'won't you—won't you take the ponies and drive in? You will get there so much sooner: and I fear that your brother is in pain.'

'Your brother,'—she ought to have said, 'Mr. Eustace Warrington,' but a little touch of nature brought the more familiar term to her lips, and she did not herself notice it.

She rose to leave the carriage.

'But you?' asked Warrington.

'I'll wait over there under the trees.'

She pointed to a seat a little way down the road, under the shade of some elms.

'You can send me the pony carriage back.'

'Really, but this is very kind of you,' said Warrington, half hesitating to accept her offer.

She had her foot on the step of the carriage, but was half afraid to trust herself to step out unaided. Warrington saw her embarrassment, and held out his hand to assist her, and she placed her hand in it: his touch thrilling every nerve in her.

He took the opportunity the moment gave him to look closely at her. The

piteous sight! This pretty girl! A great pang of pity wrung his heart. What a wreck the poor little thing was. How wan! how pale! how thin! Her cheeks as white as lilies: the little bones cutting sharp angles in her young face: her eyelids so heavy; her great eyes full of a desolate languor; the small hand that lay in his a mere handful of poor little bones; and her arm so powerless that it was a wonder how she could have managed the ponies.

What Eustace had said a few nights before came into his mind. And he asked himself,

'Did I really come down here and destroy this poor girl's peace?'

Not willingly would he have done such a thing. There was a natural chivalry in him that would rather that he should have loved her, and have been jilted again,

than have broken the poor girl's heart like this.

What was it that made him feel that now, at this moment, if he might have done it, he would have liked to draw the little broken thing into his own strong arms and to have held her there against his breast, and to have said to her something—what could it be?—that should have again given her life and courage, as he had given her courage that day of their first meeting on the beach.

But she was safely on the ground. All that both of them had felt had occupied less time by far than it has taken to relate. And she had said, 'Thanks,' and he had let her hand go. And now she stood aside to leave him to step into the pony-carriage.

He did so at once. He was anxious

about his brother, and yet he was loth to leave her to wait alone by the road-side.

'Are you sure that I ought to leave you here?' he asked.

'Pray do not apologise.'

'I am more obliged to you than I can say.'

For all answer a little bow; a cold, formal little bow.

Wheeling the ponies round, Warrington drove away. He was soon in Lynham, thanks to the nimble little beasts. Eustace's knee-cap had been displaced by the blow from the wheel. Warrington quickly made arrangements for his being taken to Lynhurst, in the way that would give him the least pain, and then hurried to the pony carriage to drive back to Lily. He might, indeed, have sent the carriage

to her by some one else a quarter-of-an-hour sooner: and he chided himself for selfishness for not having done so. But he wished himself to take her back her carriage, he could not have exactly said why.

He was anxious about his brother, and yet, somehow, all the way he was thinking of Lily Hardwick.

He found her waiting under the trees at the place she had named. During his absence she had been saying to herself, 'Now, if he brings the ponies back himself, that will be acknowledging that he appreciates what I did. If he sends them back by some one else, that will be because he does not care.' Only as the delay grew longer she became sure that he would himself come back with them. And here he was at last.

Not that their meeting had any meaning now. That was all over.

As he drew near she rose, and came a few steps to meet him.

'I have arranged everything for my brother. And I do not know how I am to thank you,' he said.

'You are very welcome. I hope Mr. Eustace Warrington is not seriously hurt.'

The tone was perfectly polite: but a perfect stranger might have used it.

'We fear that his knee-cap has been dislocated: that it may prove a long and rather painful affair.'

'I am very sorry to hear it.'—Still the same reserved tone.

And she moved to step into the carriage.

'May I assist you?' said Warrington.

'Thanks.'

And she accepted the support of his arm.

Then taking her seat, she gathered up the reins.

And then with a little inclination of her head, whilst Warrington raised his hat, she spoke a word to the ponies, turned them round and drove away.

Half-a-minute Warrington stood looking after her. Then he walked on toward Lynhurst.

He was disappointed. He had fancied that, after he had brought her back her pony-carriage, what had occurred might furnish an opportunity for a reconciliation. He had hoped it, too. She had behaved very prettily, very kindly, in coming to tell him of his brother's misfortune, and in lending him her little trap. After that he thought that she might accept some sort of

apology; and then they would be friends again. But evidently her intention was nothing of the kind.

He was sorry for it. He would have liked to be able to show her that he had deeply felt her kindness.

And, poor girl! How ill she seemed to be!

He would not have believed that a mere disappointment in love could have so utterly broken a girl's life. And certainly he himself was not worth what she was suffering. She must have been very much attached to him—very much more than he had ever suspected.

He began to think with himself that if, instead of making her understand that he had not the least capacity for caring for her, he had proposed to her and made her his wife, he would at least have done a

good action. And he would have had a charming little wife, charmingly pretty, and charmingly bright, and with a good heart too.

If he could have foreseen all that would ensue, he really did not know that he would not rather have married her, than have let the poor little thing go and break her heart in this way for a man not worth it.

CHAPTER IV.

'Mrs. Gainsborough's compliments, sir, and she would like to know how Mr. Eustace Warrington is this morning.'

Thus the servant coming into the room where Frank Warrington was sitting by his brother's bedside.

It was the second day after Eustace's accident. The injury he had received had turned out after all to be more serious than was at first supposed. There was even some danger of Eustace's being lame; and Warrington was contemplating with dis-

quietude the prospect of his brother's being perhaps deprived of the pedestrian exercise, which, as well as being good for his health, was one of his principal pleasures. Dr. Gregg had been sent for at once, and had done what he could. Whether he had done what he should was another question, and one about which neither of the brothers felt altogether satisfied. In any case, there was no doubt that Eustace would have to remain for a long time in bed, and to bear a good deal of pain. Warrington had had a bed made up for him in one of the large unoccupied rooms. The place was bare and comfortless in appearance, the few pieces of furniture disconsolately scattered at wide distances from one another, and the paper partly torn off the blank walls. But none of these things mattered to Eustace, and the room was large, and cool,

and airy, and filled in this summer-tide with the fresh fragrance of the trees outside.

Eustace was in great pain, and had hardly slept at all during the night. On the previous day he had been better. Warrington had read to him for several hours, and, though suffering a good deal, Eustace had been able to give his attention to what was read, and had been amused. But this morning the pain was too acute for him to be able to listen.

He was bearing it all very patiently; with his usual good spirits making a jest even of his sufferings, jokingly expressing a hope that a series of sinister accidents might not be about to make him, as well as blind, lame, deaf, dumb, and insensible; and laughing at his brother for blaming himself—as he had done severely—for

having left him alone in Lynham, and so having been indirectly the cause of what had ensued. 'As if, my dear Frank,' he said laughing, 'it was not all my own fault: seeing that I infinitely prefer having my own way, and taking the consequences, to being always dependent either upon you, or upon anyone else. A weakness on my part I know, but one of which this little *contre-temps* is not going to cure me, I assure you.'

At the same time, though not in any way alarmed about himself, the pain he was suffering strongly disposed him to agree with his brother that they should seek some advice more trustworthy than that of Dr. Gregg.

'What am I to say to Mrs. Gainsborough, Eustace?' asked Warrington. 'I suppose it must be that you are in more pain this morning?'

'Yes. Unluckily you may say that with a good deal of truth.'

'Who has come?' asked Warrington.

'The man-servant, sir.'

'I'll go down and speak to him myself,' said Warrington. And he added, in explanation to Eustace: 'I want to know how Miss Hardwick is.'

'Ah, he wants to know how Miss Hardwick is,' said Eustace to himself, as soon as the other had left the room. 'I wonder whether Frank's eyes will ever be opened respecting Miss Hardwick. He is a deal blinder than I. These people who can see are all alike in that respect. It is a most extraordinary thing. And they have no sense of touch or hearing to compensate for it. I really sometimes think that we are the better off after all.'

Meanwhile Warrington went to the

hall to speak to Mrs. Gainsborough's servant.

The momentary rencontre between himself and Lily Hardwick, of which his brother's accident had been the occasion, had left an impression upon Frank Warrington altogether disproportionate to its brevity and the simple nature of all that had passed. The girl's behaviour; her driving off to find him the moment she had learned what had happened; the crimson that flushed her face as she addressed him; the loan of her carriage; her wan features; the wasted little hand she had laid in his; her reserve, and the air of an utter stranger with which she parted from him; everyone of these had furnished him with matter for reflection that had since occupied his mind every moment that it was released from

his immediate anxiety about his brother.

Really, without in the least suspecting it, Lily Hardwick had again played a master-stroke. She had compelled a man who was not indifferent to her, to notice and admire her, and at the same time had refused him any opportunity to express what he felt. The skill of the most accomplished of coquettes could not have gone much farther.

And her master-stroke was producing its effect.

There is no surer way of parting love than to part the lovers. The expedient is almost infallible. It is almost as difficult for men and women to continue to love those whom they never see, as to fall in love with those whom they have never seen. Young people who value each other's affections ought to be warned of this, to take it to

heart, and to remember that howsoever highly they may rate their own powers of constancy they will be very foolish to trust to the sincerest passion to withstand what is really a law of nature: that those who are parted cease to love.

After all, that is a gentle, tender law of the great mother's, made to spare many hearts, and a law too with a mighty reason. For that the young should love is the most important thing in the whole great world. Everything else, politics, law, order, science, art, literature, philosophy, virtue, and truth are in importance, all of them taken together, just a mere bagatelle compared with the love of the young. Humanity got along without any of these things for many thousand years, the greater part of humanity gets along without most of them still. But without love, plain, un-

sophisticated passionate love, the whole future of the race would not be worth sixty years. And so if young people are thwarted in their love, parted and kept out of the way of bringing their passion for each other to happiness, nature (who is not to be thwarted) gives them oblivion, mostly very promptly (she does not stand upon ceremony, nature) and a new love. If she did not, how many people would have children? In how many cases is a marriage the wedding of two first loves? So, seeing that this is nature's way, let all whom it may concern take the fact to heart, and keep in sight of those whose love they prize.

But, to resume; when, on the other hand, young people who are attached to each other, after having been parted only for a little time, insufficient seriously to affect their passion, unexpectedly find themselves

again thrown into each other's society, then the converse takes place: there is a sharp reaction, a few minutes suffice to repair and more than to repair any coolness time and separation may have produced in their mutual attachment.

This was exactly what had happened to Warrington. The chagrin he had at first felt, when Lily Hardwick cut him, had to some extent worn off with time. But now that he had again exchanged half-a-dozen sentences with her, felt the touch of her hand, looked into her wistful eyes, and then seen her turn away, relentlessly determined to be for ever a stranger to him, he discovered that there was something between her and him stronger than he had suspected.

He found Mrs. Gainsborough's servant waiting in the hall.

'Will you please,' said Warrington, 'give my compliments to Mrs. Gainsborough and tell her that Mr. Eustace Warrington has spent a bad night, and is this morning in great pain; but that we hope that everything is going on satisfactorily. And, by-the-way, how is Miss Hardwick this morning?'

'Not so well, sir.'

Warrington returned to his brother.

'Miss Hardwick is worse,' he said, briefly.

That was all, but the cadence of his voice was grave.

And Eustace heard him cross the room and sit down by the window.

Later the doctor called, and had nothing very definite to say: 'Sometimes in these cases there is very acute pain, in fact generally.' After luncheon Eustace slept

a little and Warrington went out to take a turn in the avenue.

When a man is for ever thinking of one little face; when he is for ever dreaming of the touch of one small hand; when nothing can divert his mind from five minutes spent the day before yesterday with a girl with weary eyes; when the pain of one little heart is more to him than the pain of all the world; when the sadness of one little breast seems sadder to him than all the sadness he himself has ever known; when he begins to think to himself what he would not gladly do, or suffer, to bring the smiles back into that little face, to drive the pain from that little heart, to restore the light to the once bright eyes—what is then the matter with the man?

What is the matter with him? The question must be a very difficult one to

answer, for Frank Warrington walked up and down in the avenue, and could come to no conclusion.

But in the evening, after dinner, smoking alone under the shaky old verandah, he confessed the truth to himself at last.

'I have been in love with that girl for the last six months or more—that is the fact.'

There are moments in the life of a man, when he receives the impression of a curtain being suddenly drawn aside, displaying an unexpected panorama. All that he sees has been there for a long time, only the curtain has hid it. The effect upon him is a shock of sharp surprise, heightened by the fact that he knows what has suddenly been revealed to him is already of long standing.

It was such an impression that Frank Warrington received this evening, and a long time he walked up and down on the uneven flags, reviewing in the new light suddenly thrown upon it his own history of the last eight months.

He summed it all up for himself very briefly at last.

'Eustace told me how it would be with me, and I would not believe him. The girl too fell straight in love with me, and I have given myself the trouble to break her heart. Because my cousin, who did not love me, and with whom I should most probably not have been happy, jilted me, I have, of my own free will, coolly flung away a charming girl who does love me, as charming a girl as any man could ask for as his wife: and, having been duped by one woman, I have behaved

like a brute to another. Certainly I am a fool.'

And now?

That is always the great question. The past, nothing can be done with that. In the present something is always possible.

Leaning against the pillar of the verandah, Warrington was half disposed to go straight to Cliff Cottage, even without going upstairs to see his brother, and to ask to see Miss Hardwick; to tell her that he had been a blind idiot, but that he had found his senses at last, and that he was come to ask her to remember that they had been friends.

Only this did not seem to be a very hopeful speech to make to a young lady. And, the more he pondered what he really should say for himself, the more difficult

it appeared to find anything reasonable. He could not go point-blank to the girl, and tell her, 'I love you.'

And he began to think of the other side of the question: 'How would Miss Hardwick reply?'

Suppose she were to reply that she had no desire to be loved out of compassion.

That decided him. Lily Hardwick would refuse any advances he might make. He had found out the truth too late. He might have had her only a few weeks ago; and the girl would not have broken her heart. Now—she would refuse him.

He was quite right. If he had gone to see her that evening, supposing that he had managed to see her, which was unlikely, Lily would have told him that their acquaintance was at an end.

In addition to which she would not have lived another forty-eight hours.

Mrs. Gainsborough had heard of the adventure of driving after Warrington to tell him of his brother's accident. She found in the proceeding a significance quite different from any that either Lily or Warrington had given it; and had already taken counsel with herself what she would do if this last move of her cousin's should have consequences.

So it was well that Warrington did not act upon his first impulse. Instead, he returned to his brother.

Eustace was in a little less pain. Warrington sat down by his bed, and they began to talk of the advisability of consulting some one more experienced than Dr. Gregg. If the thing could be managed, Warrington would have had Eustace

go up to town, and have the best advice procurable. It turned out that Eustace himself had thought of the same thing. The only question was how he would bear the journey. Warrington proposed to bring over a well-known surgeon from the neighbouring county town, and to take his advice on the subject. If he thought Eustace could be moved, they would go up to town together, and remain there until Eustace was well.

'Only,' objected Eustace, 'if this is going to be an affair of some months, you will want to come down here to look after the place.'

'The place must look after itself,' said Warrington. He moved restlessly, and Eustace heard it. Then he added, 'The truth is, I shall be glad to get away. I

don't know that I won't sell the place, after all.'

Again he stopped, but resumed after a minute,

'You may as well know all about it. I don't want to make secrets. You remember possibly a conversation that we had a few days ago; on the day of your ominous dream?'

'We talked about Miss Hardwick?'

'Yes.'

'My dear fellow, do not say any more. I perfectly understand what you mean. You have discovered that, after all, I was right about you and Miss Hardwick.'

'Yes,' bluntly.

'Well, I can't tell you how glad I am to hear it.'

'Only, unfortunately, you see, I have

recovered my senses a little too late,' remarked Warrington, sombrely.

'How so? What do you mean?'

Warrington explained what he meant: with which the reader is already acquainted.

But Eustace interrupted him.

'Look here, Frank, you have been blinder than a mole. You have found that out at last. For once, just believe that I can see some things. Go, the first thing to-morrow morning, to Miss Hardwick. Think nothing about what you will say to her till you are with her, and then say the first thing that comes to the tip of your tongue.'

In a way, the advice was good advice. Warrington could see that. But he told his brother frankly that he did not believe he should follow it.

And he did not: fortunately for poor Lily, whose immediate fate, as has been said, was just at this juncture hanging upon a thread.

CHAPTER V.

Instead of going to Cliff Cottage, Warrington, on the following morning, directly after Dr. Gregg's visit, which was early, went off by rail to try to find the medical man of whom he and his brother had spoken on the previous day. He was fortunate enough to bring him back with him in the afternoon. A consultation followed, with the result that it was decided that Eustace should at once be taken to town, the medical man being of opinion that the journey ought not, with proper precautions, to do him any harm.

By noon the next day, the brothers had both left Lynham.

The news of their departure reached Cliff Cottage the same evening.

Maud Gainsborough at first hardly believed her ears; and then drew, secretly, a long breath of relief. For the last three days she had been apprehending the new complications which she believed must inevitably arise now that her cousin had chosen to renew her acquaintance with Frank Warrington. But once more chance had proved her ally. Warrington was gone away. If Eustace's case proved only half as slow as the medical men predicted, long before the brothers returned the day of anxieties about Lily would be over.

She herself took the news to Lily.

'Mr. Warrington and his brother have

gone away to town. They left at noon to-day quite suddenly. Mr. Eustace Warrington is to be under the care of some celebrated surgeon.'

Lily was lying on the drawing-room sofa, to all appearance only half-conscious, in reality prostrated with a maddening headache. She made no answer, but she said to herself,

'So, then, it is all over!'

She was in too much pain to think, but some vague, straggling impressions passed across her aching brain. She would liked to have seen Warrington once more, just once more: perhaps to have put her hand in his, and to have said, 'Good-bye.' This morning—was it this morning, or yesterday?—when she was a little better she had been resolving that the accident which had occurred should not become

the ground of a reconciliation. But, what had that to do with it? Why, that perhaps it would have been better if she had relented a little: only because she would never see him again. Never! never! never! seemed to beat upon her aching brain like the strokes of a hammer. Before he came back she would be dead. She was sinking every day. They tried to persuade her that she was not, but she knew better. She would die. And she would never see Frank Warrington again. If, instead of only bowing to him that afternoon, she had said, 'Good-bye,' that would have been better.

But what was the use of wishing that she had done differently? The opportunity was past. And she could not think: her head gave her too much pain.

Maud had sat down by her side.

'Perhaps it is just as well that they are gone, dear. I mean, darling, that perhaps you will feel it all less, now that Mr. Warrington is gone away.'

But the girl still said nothing.

'Are you very ill to-night, dear?' asked Mrs. Gainsborough, bending over her.

'Oh, for goodness sake, Maud, do not speak to me. You put me to torture,' exclaimed the girl, impatiently. 'I am mad with head-ache.'

'Where is the pain, dear?'

'At the back of my head.'

Maud rose and glided away from her, saying to herself,

'Yes, I know it does bring a head-ache at the back of the head. I am sure I wish that it did not. It is no pleasure to me to make the poor girl suffer so.'

By the window she paused and looked out.

'Three months,' she reflected in herself. 'It would be something about that time, the doctor said, before Mr. Eustace Warrington will be well. Three months, August, September, October. The trees will be in all their glorious autumn tints, but the days will have become shorter, and we shall have fires. There will be chrysanthemums in the garden, some dahlias, and the last of the roses. And Lily will have been buried weeks before that. People will be beginning to forget all about her. Perhaps the little marble cross will be already standing above her grave. *He* and I might meet by it some day; that will be worth remembering. The hunting season will be beginning. And I shall have found those papers. We

shall have all the winter before us, the days of thick furs, and of afternoons that turn soon into twilight, and of confidences by the bright fireside. And I shall be in black. Black always becomes me. And I shall be able to talk to him touchingly about poor Lily, so touchingly. I shall soon make him come to me. The magnetism will be stronger than he will be able to resist.'

And, with her pulse heightened with pleasurable anticipation, the young widow turned from the window, and took up her fancy-work.

It turned out to be a good thing that Eustace had come to London. Dr. Gregg had not gone to work in the right way at all, and his patient would, in all probability, have become permanently lame under his treatment. After a little con-

sideration Eustace preferred, rather than to be nursed in lodgings, to become a paying patient in one of the larger hospitals. He got more attention, and better advice, in that way than was procurable in any other manner, and, besides, he was amused with the idea of spending his enforced imprisonment in the study of an hitherto unknown phase of life. His brother took rooms near the hospital, and every day spent a number of hours with him; and, though Eustace suffered a good deal of pain, the cure of his knee, under the careful watching and nursing of the hospital, progressed surely and satisfactorily.

More than once he broached to his brother the subject of Miss Hardwick. But he found that Warrington was disinclined to talk about her, and invariably

at once changed the conversation to some other topic. Warrington had thought a good deal about her since he had been in town. That goes without saying. But he was unwilling to converse on a subject about which he still remained very undecided. He had not, in fact, been able to make up his mind how a man in his position ought to behave.

Two courses were open to him. One course was, seeing that he had had the stupidity to reject the affection of a girl for whom he had formed a sincere attachment, to cure himself of his passion for her as best he could; to call time and circumstances to his aid to efface a love he had forfeited the right to plead. The other course was, simply to wait and see what the future might bring forth; perhaps some day to return to Lynham, to earn the right

to press his suit, and then to see if, after all, Miss Hardwick would perhaps pardon and accept him.

Of the two courses his inclination was, on the whole, towards the former. There is a disposition on the part of every man of really honourable feelings to forbid himself the love of a woman, though he may be sincerely attached to her, the instant he detects anything to blame in the history of his passion.

But for the present, at any rate, the course he was pursuing was the latter, a mere waiting upon uncertainty.

He was in no particular good-humour with himself, a trifle dull and out of spirits, and disposed to smoke a great deal, and to say little, as he had done after his cousin jilted him.

Eustace formed his own opinion about

his brother's despondency. He believed that Warrington, having found out that he was in love with Lily Hardwick, had come to London with the deliberate intention of curing himself of his liking, in accordance with the resolution he had so often expressed never again to fall under the influence of a woman.

Eustace regretted the resolution. He could have given more good reasons than one for honestly wishing that his brother would marry Lily Hardwick. She was a good girl, and would make an excellent wife. If he was at all a judge of character, she was just the wife Frank should have. Her gentle companionship would do Frank a world of good: and with their two fortunes, which were fairly equal, they would be comfortably off, and Warrington in a position to complete the redemption of

his estate. For his own part Eustace would gain a sister-in-law whom he could sincerely like; and the girl would marry a man she loved.

But Eustace said nothing about all these things to Warrington. He knew his brother's temperament. Warrington was a man to whom it was useless under certain circumstances to say anything. So Eustace held his peace, and patiently left events to go their own way.

Meanwhile day succeeded day, and in a manner that was eventless and a trifle dull, more so for Warrington than for Eustace, who had a knack of being always amused at what was going on around him, a fortnight passed by.

Then one afternoon, quite unexpectedly, Warrington ran up against Anthony Gainsborough in Pall Mall.

'My dear Warrington; you in town!' exclaimed Mr. Gainsborough.

'Well, I was just going to say the same thing to you,' replied Warrington. 'I imagined that in this month of August you must be either on the Norwegian coast, or up in the Baltic, or on some other voyage or another.'

'No. We are all at Twickenham.'

Warrington noticed the 'we,' and knew what it meant.

'Can you come over and dine with us?' continued Anthony Gainsborough.

'Well: you know that I had rather not,' replied Warrington, frankly.

To change the subject he began to explain what had brought him to town.

'Have you had luncheon?' said Anthony Gainsborough. 'No? Well come, and

have luncheon with me at the "Travellers," and we will have a talk.'

So the two men went to the club together. After luncheon Anthony Gainsborough again tried the strength of his persuasive powers in a pressing appeal to Warrington to come to dinner.

'What you are doing, Warrington, is not right,' he said at last. 'Your cousins are asking, begging to be permitted to make you *l'amende honorable*, and you refuse them—two young girls. It is not right, my boy. But if you won't, you won't.'

Howbeit, Frank Warrington was obdurate.

'Whom do you think I met in town this morning?' asked Anthony Gainsborough of his nieces at dinner.

Neither of the girls could guess.

'Frank Warrington.'

'Uncle Tony!' exclaimed both the girls simultaneously. And Essie went on, 'But why did you not bring him back with you to dinner?'

'I did my best to persuade him, I assure you,' answered Anthony Gainsborough, 'but he is uncommonly shy of you two young ladies, and I could do nothing with him.'

'I wish I could see him,' remarked Essie.

'You think you could persuade him?' asked her uncle.

Essie's only answer was to repeat,

'I wish I could see him.'

If it had depended upon Warrington, that she would certainly never have done. Howbeit, very few things depend upon a man's own will, happily for

men; and she and Warrington met before the end of the next week.

Warrington went in the evening to the theatre. He had a taste for the drama, and, having had no opportunity for indulging his taste at Lynham, had several times lately, when the hospital regulations precluded him from being with his brother in the evenings, dropped in at such houses as were open.

He was in the stalls. When the piece began, the three stalls nearest to him in the same row were unoccupied. Towards the end of the first act, a movement on his left aroused his attention to the fact that some one was coming down the row, probably the occupants of the empty stalls. He looked round casually.

Anthony Gainsborough and the two Misses Chesterfield.

So what he had refused to accord, in spite of all the justest and most kindly persuasions, chance compelled him to submit to without consulting his tastes at all. A thing that in this world very often happens.

Anthony Gainsborough was the first of the three, and at once sat down in the stall nearest Warrington. The girls, who had changed colour, bowed as they passed, Violet first, Essie after her. And Warrington, of necessity, returned their bows. By that time Anthony Gainsborough was offering his hand, and shook hands with him with a very cordial 'How do you do, very glad to see you.' Essie was next to her uncle, and bent forward to see if there was any possibility of shaking hands with Warrington across him. But Warrington

had already resolutely fixed his eyes on the stage.

The drop-scene fell. As it came down Warrington bent over to Anthony Gainsborough, and indistinctly said something, in the form of an excuse. Anthony Gainsborough could not understand it, and it was not Warrington's intention that he should understand it. And then Warrington rose and left his stall.

He had foreseen what would ensue if he remained in the theatre, and he meant quietly to slip away.

But before he had reached the end of the row Essie had risen too.

'Where are you going, my dear?' asked her uncle.

'Don't you see that Cousin Frank is leaving?'

'He will come back.'

'That is what I am not so sure of.'

And she followed Warrington out. He had his crush hat in his hand, and made straight for the exit of the theatre.

'Ah! I thought so,' quoth Essie to herself.

The people coming out to promenade in the corridor during the entre-act impeded Warrington a little, or she would hardly have overtaken him. As it was, however, just as he reached the glass-doors that led into the vestibule, a tall, slim figure slipped suddenly before him, and a girl held out her hand.

'Cousin Frank.'

And, as he hesitated, though it was only for an instant, she added, looking into his face,

'What! you won't shake hands?'

Of course there were already half-a-dozen people looking on. And Warrington had to shake hands.

Essie Chesterfield drew him a little aside from the doors.

'You know, Frank, that you are being awfully unkind,' she said, confidentially, in a slight tone of reproach. And then, looking him right in the face, she added, with intention, 'Will you come to luncheon at Twickenham to-morrow?'

'I am very sorry———' began Warrington.

'Then, listen.—No!' He had made a step towards the exit, and she put herself in front of him. 'Frank, you are awfully unkind. When will you come?'

Warrington simply looked down on the ground.

'You mean that you won't come at all?' said the girl. 'It is awfully unkind. Vi and I want to beg your pardon, and to thank you; and you know it. And, Frank'—she dropped her voice—'you *must come*.'

'But really, Miss Chesterfield,' protested Frank Warrington; and he looked around him.

He was exceedingly uncomfortable. He could not exactly say how many people were admiring this small *intermezzo* of a domestic drama between herself and her cousin which Miss Essie Chesterfield was providing for their entertainment, nor how many were listening to the subdued schooling which the tall girl was administering. But, to judge from the smiles and side-glances of which he just caught a glimpse, they must be a good many.

'Listen,' went on Essie, in a lower voice. 'You *must* come. If you won't, Frank, I'll kneel down '—she pointed to the floor at her feet—'and beg your pardon here: before everyone. I will! Shall I, or will you come to luncheon to-morrow?'

A pretty dilemma for a man to find himself in! With a girl who was about to go down on her knees in a nice open place, close to the exit of a theatre, with a score of men and women standing around to see.

'If you cannot make up your mind, you leave me no choice,' continued Essie, seeing Warrington delayed reply, as much because she had clean taken his breath away with surprise as for any other reason.

And, resting one hand against the wall, she actually bent her knee.

'No, no, Miss Chesterfield,' exclaimed Warrington, stepping forward and arresting her movement. 'I'll come to luncheon.'

He had positively turned pale.

'To-morrow?' looking straight into his eyes.

'To-morrow.'

'To-morrow, at two, then. You *will* come? On your honour as a gentleman?' laying her hand on his shoulder, to emphasize her words.

'Yes.'

'No: say "on your honour."'

'Well'—he could not help laughing—'"on my honour," then.'

'Then, that is all right,' said Essie, removing her hand. 'Are you going back to see the rest of the piece?'

'No, I am going home.'

'Then good-night: and *au revoir*.'

They shook hands, and Warrington went out of the theatre, and she back to her stall.

She had had the best of the encounter by a good deal, as she had had the last time she and her cousin parted—in the Midland Railway station. But the truth is that, in every single combat of this sort between a man and a girl, the sentiments natural to the man, and the courtesies that education and the usage of the world have added to them, and the absolute liberty of attack the woman enjoys, and the very narrow bounds within which the man is compelled to limit his defence, give the girl a crushing advantage, against which no man can hold his own, unless he is a boor or a lover.

When Essie got back to her uncle, she said,

'Frank is coming to luncheon with us to-morrow, at two.'

'You persuaded him, then?' asked Anthony Gainsborough, with surprise.

'No: I forced him.'

On the morrow Warrington kept his promise, and went down to Twickenham.

When he returned home in the evening, he had been at Anthony Gainsborough's house not some three hours as he anticipated, but more nearly ten.

And when Eustace inquired about all that had happened, there really was nothing to tell. Warrington on his arrival had found his cousins alone: and their apologies for the way they had behaved to him were made before their uncle came into the room; a few words, gracefully spoken, and very sincerely; that was really all, and it

was all over. The only thing that had astonished him was that Essie, in the midst of her little speech, burst into tears. Afterwards Anthony Gainsborough came in, and they had luncheon. And Warrington remained till late in the evening, talking to him and to the girls about their cruise and about his estates at Lynham.

CHAPTER VI.

So the whole quarrel had come to an end. And, on retrospect, there did not seem to have been very much in it. An escapade of two girls who ought to have known better, but whose lives were being made a burden to them, and a breach between two young people going to be married, who had had the extreme good fortune to quarrel before the wedding-day instead of afterwards. It appeared that it would have been rather to be regretted if things had fallen out anyhow else. Warrington

began to fancy that he had shown himself more resentful than wise.

And the next day the girls went to see Eustace.

At any rate the reconciliation was a boon to Eustace. His knee was progressing, and he suffered much less pain, but he was still unable to leave his bed, and was permitted little change of position, and the hours (though he never complained) were sometimes very long. His visitors, too, were few. Most of his friends were out of town, and so to have his cousins come to see him, and to receive an occasional visit from Anthony Gainsborough, were very welcome treats to the blind man. The girls came often. They brought him flowers and fruit, and stayed with him a long time, sometimes reading to him, more often telling him of all the

gossip they knew, and talking to him (frequently both at once) with all the careless gaiety of two light hearts without a chagrin in the world. There was a talk of Eustace's going to Twickenham for a few weeks as soon as he was well enough to become an out-patient, and Eustace himself evidently looked forward to the plan with pleasure.

As for Warrington, now that there was nothing to keep him away from Twickenham, he went there somewhat often. It was a good deal more pleasant to have Anthony Gainsborough's agreeable house to go to when he pleased than to wander backwards and forwards only from his chambers to the hospital and from the hospital to the club, and from the club back to his chambers.

One evening, Anthony Gainsborough

coming home rather late after dining at his club asked,

'Have either of you girls ever heard the name of any young lady at Lynham mentioned in connection with your Cousin Frank?'

Neither of them ever had.

'My informant said something about a young widow. But it appeared to me to be mere gossip,' said Anthony Gainsborough.

The following day, when Warrington was having luncheon at Twickenham, Violet asked quite casually, in the course of the meal,

'Essie, is it not a long time since you heard from Lily Hardwick?'

'Yes, more than three weeks.'

'You answered her last letter?'

'Long ago. I think I must write to

her again. I am afraid that she is ill. In her last letter she spoke of herself as being far from well.' Looking across the table at Warrington, she continued, 'Did you know that we knew Miss Hardwick who lives with Mrs. Gainsborough at Lynhurst?'

'I think I have heard something to that effect,' said Warrington.

A few days later he asked Essie,

'Have you heard from your friend Miss Hardwick?'

'Why, no,' answered Essie. 'I wrote but I have had no answer. It makes me think that she must be really ill—too ill, perhaps, to write. I wish I knew.'

After a short pause Essie went on, 'I believe that you do not know her, do you? She was here with us a good deal in the summer, and when we asked her

about you she told us that she did not know you. But,' Essie looked at him archly, 'she told us that report gave you an unenviable character.'

'Indeed?' said Warrington.

'Yes,' answered Essie. 'I forget now exactly what it was that she said: "Mysogynist," I think. Some sort of rather morose animal.' She went on, looking at him a little significantly, 'I don't know that she was not a wee bit right. You are a good deal altered, Frank, from what you used to be.'

'You think so?'

Essie did not answer the question, which perhaps wanted no answer, but smoothing out her dress remarked,

'I never quite understood how it was, Frank, that you managed not to know Lily Hardwick. You know Mrs. Gains-

borough quite well, do you not? And Lily Hardwick lives with her.'

'Yes, I know Mrs. Gainsborough,' answered Warrington.

And there was a shade of embarrassment in his tone.

'I am afraid Lily Hardwick must be very ill,' resumed Essie, speaking rather to herself than to Warrington. 'If you don't know her, I suppose it is of no use asking you how she was when you left Lynham.'

'But I happen to know. The day before we left, Mrs. Gainsborough sent to inquire after Eustace. And I took the opportunity to ask the servant how Miss Hardwick was that morning, for we knew she was not well. And that morning she was worse.'

'Let me see,' said Essie, 'that was a

month ago. Ah, but I have heard since then. She was not well when she came up to town: and she had a relapse after her return home, I did not understand exactly what was the matter with her.'

'I was told great lassitude, and some slight affection of the heart.'

'Do you know how it began?' asked Essie.

That was a difficult question. But Warrington managed to extricate himself.

'I was told that she had been very much upset about something, and that it had affected her health. I do not know how far it is true.'

'Upset about what?'

'Well, really, you see, I am only repeating hearsay. I am afraid that I cannot tell you much more.'

And he began to talk of something else.

But, guarded as he had been, his manner had awakened in Essie a suspicion of something concealed. And she was not long in forming plans to discover if her suspicions had any substantial grounds. After a very brief reflection, she resolved, to see whether anything was to be learned from Eustace. And on the occasion of her next visit with her sister to the hospital she acted upon her resolution. And very surprised were both she and Violet when they found out what there was to hear.

'Good gracious, Eustace,' exclaimed Violet, before Eustace had said a dozen words. 'What are you saying? Frank is in love with her. You don't mean it?'

'Tell us everything about it, everything, everything,' cried Essie, without waiting for her sister to finish what she was saying.

Eustace did tell them everything, from the evening on the beach to their leaving Lynham. He was under no promise of secrecy. And he had some hope that by speaking he might do good. And in that he was more right than he suspected.

'You see,' he concluded, in his philosophic way, 'when a man has been shamefully treated by one woman—that is you, Vi——'

'Yes. I plead guilty, Eustace,' admitted Violet Chesterfield.

'Well, then, that is just the time when he is most likely to fall straight in love with another woman. And that, you see, is what Frank did. Only—as you had

used him so badly—he had unluckily made some sort of vow to himself never to have anything to do with young ladies. He is exceedingly fond of this girl, and she is simply breaking her heart about him. But he will have nothing to do with her. Now, you two made the mischief, and put it into his head to make this vow. You had better see if you can't mend it by making him break his vow.'

'And, meanwhile,' put in Essie, 'what is the matter with poor Lily is that she is simply breaking her heart?'

'Yes.'

'Well,' said Essie, when she and her sister were again in the carriage to drive home, 'what do you say to what we have heard this afternoon?'

'I didn't think Frank would have changed his mind so soon,' answered Violet, evidently not quite pleased.

Essie burst out laughing.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a day or two later. The two sisters, walking slowly up and down a shaded path in their uncle's garden, were engaged in discussing the revelation Eustace Warrington had made to them, and Essie was describing a plan of action upon which she had determined.

'But, Essie!' cried Violet, a good deal surprised at the boldness of the measures her sister was describing; 'you don't mean that you are really going to talk to Frank about his being in love with Lily Hardwick?'

'Certainly, that is just what I *do* mean,' replied Essie, stopping to select a tea-rose from a bush. 'Lily is my friend. Frank has behaved badly to her, and I am going to interfere.'

'But——'

'Well: but what?' demanded Essie, fastening the rose in her bosom.

'How can you? How will you manage it? How will you begin? You'll make him awfully angry.'

'He can be as angry as ever he likes,' remarked Essie, looking down at the rose to see how it matched her dress. 'I shall attack him quite directly, and the very next time I see him. *Apropos;* that is well thought of. He is coming down to-morrow to dine. He is sure to come early. He likes sitting on the lawn here better than sitting in his chambers: and he

knows that we are going on the water. You and Uncle Tony shall go on the water, I shall stay at home and get Frank to walk down with me to meet you, and on the way I will make him understand what he has to do.'

'And you will see that he won't do it,' answered Violet, in her careless way.

Essie made no answer. She had resolved on her part. It was some one's place to interfere, to put a stop to Lily Hardwick's breaking her heart, and to Frank's being a goose, and refusing himself a charming girl to whom he was sincerely attached. And if no one else would do anything, she, Essie, would. And she would succeed, too. She had turned her cousin Frank round with her little finger already on two occasions, and she could do it again on a

third. At least she herself entertained no doubt on the point.

The following afternoon Warrington did come down as Essie had predicted. He was rather surprised to find her at home.

'Vi and uncle are gone on the water,' she said. 'I am going down presently to meet them. Will you come down with me?'

Warrington assented, suspecting nothing. His brother had not informed him of what he had told the girls.

So, half-an-hour later, Essie and he set out together.

As soon as they were fairly out of the grounds, Essie commenced:

'I have a bone to pick with you, Cousin Frank.'

'What about?'

'About my friend, Lily Hardwick. Why did not you tell me that you liked her; and had known her; and quarrelled with her; and all about it?'

And, turning her head, she looked straight at his face for his reply.

Warrington had changed colour, and looked anything but pleased.

'Well, you don't say anything,' remarked Essie, as he did not answer.

'Who told you anything about this?' demanded Warrington.

'Your brother. He told Violet and me the other day. He was under no promise of secrecy, he said, and he told us everything. You have been behaving badly, Frank, to Lily Hardwick.'

'Possibly,' admitted Warrington, with a considerable degree of coolness. 'Suppose we change the subject.'

'No, Frank,' replied Essie, firmly. 'Now we have begun it, we will go on with it.'

'To be plain, then, I had much rather not,' objected Warrington.

'Why?' demanded Essie, flatly. And as he made no answer she went on, 'Look here, Frank, be reasonable now. Give me your arm. There'—she came close to him and slipped her arm within his—'now, listen to me, Frank, and don't get cross. You are awfully put out about this affair. Don't say that you are not. Remember everyone can *see* that you are not yourself a bit. Everyone who knows you is saying, "What is the matter with Warrington?" and meanwhile you are upset altogether, taciturn, and out of spirits, and vexed, and grave, and dissatisfied. I've seen it these three weeks,

and Eustace is quite unhappy about it. And you are miserable yourself, Frank. And you don't know what to do. You are ashamed to go to Lily, and to tell her the truth. And you can't make up your mind not to love her. And you'd be a dreadful goose if you could, for she is the dearest girl in the whole world. And so you're in a regular hobble, you see. And now, won't it be much wiser, seeing you have a knowing little cousin—that is I, you know—who can help you and will help you in any way I can, won't it be much wiser to accept my assistance, than to be cross with me, and to behave just like a self-willed man—that is to say, an obstinate bear—and to refuse my assistance, when you know very well that if I don't do you any good I can't do you any harm.'

Warrington was silent. He knew the girl meant to be kind, and he had to admit a great deal of truth in what she was saying; certainly in her last remark, that if she did him no good she could do him no harm.

'Well, now then,' resumed Essie, 'Frank, you are very fond of Lily.'

'I suppose so,' granted Warrington, vaguely.

'You *suppose* so! Oh, you men! I wonder how any girl can waste her affections on you. You *suppose* so! And Lily, she is fond of you?'

'They say so.'

'You know nothing about it, then?'

'Oh, yes; I take it it is true. But I thought you heard all about this,' added Warrington, who was not enjoying being catechized.

'Well, then: and now, pray, how came you two, you and Lily, to quarrel?'

'She cut me, you see.'

'What for, Frank? Come, now.'

'Look here, Essie, I'd rather not talk about all this.'

'But, you goose, you must talk about it. If I am to help you. Now, sir, what did Lily cut you for?'

It was useless to try to put her off, and so Warrington, seeing he had no alternative, replied,

'Well, you see. I knew she was getting rather fond of me,' he explained somewhat sheepishly: 'and I believed I had had enough of the amenities of young ladies. I mean——'

'Oh, I know what you mean,' interrupted Essie. 'That refers to Violet and me. We

shall never hear the last of it, I know. Never mind. Go on.'

'Well, then. I didn't want the girl to care for me, when I couldn't care for her, you see,' explained Warrington, becoming a little more at his ease. 'And so, I tried to make her understand that. Well, I meant it kindly, I assure you.'

'You tried to make her understand that it was no use to fall in love with you.'

'Yes—exactly so.'

'And then she cut you.' She walked on a few steps in silence, and, looking on the ground, continued, 'Of course you were surprised at her cutting you?'

'Well, I was.'

'Just like a man!' commented Essie. 'He says something to a girl that makes her fit to drop for shame and mortification;

and then, if she lets him understand that there really are limits to her patience, he is taken entirely by surprise. Well, now, Frank, it is useless to talk about the past, is it not? We cannot alter that.'

'Certainly not,' conceded Warrington.

'But do you know what you have got to do?'

'No, I don't,' replied Warrington, rather blankly, and beginning to think the assistance he was supposed to be going to receive was very problematical.

'Well then. Look here, Frank. If you had a sister—first of all—this would never have happened: but next, she would, long ago, have told you what I am going to tell you now. You have no sister, you see, so you must be content, for the nonce, to take me for one. You remember you were

quite ready for that once upon a time ;' this with a mischievous little look from the corners of her eyes.

'Ah, but I escaped from that,' said Warrington, with a laugh.

'Thanks to me. Still now, cousin, you'll think the advice I am going to give you is nonsensical, and all that, I daresay, but remember that in some things women understand women better than men do. And what you must do is this : you must go down to Lynham at once ; and you must see Lily Hardwick. You must not think beforehand anything about what you are going to say to her, but when you do see her you must tell her that you have been a donkey ; that you didn't know your own mind ; and that you want her to let bygones be bygones ; and after that you can say anything else you like ; and she will

listen to you. Now, will you go down to Lynham to-morrow?'

'I may as well tell you at once that I won't,' replied Warrington, after a pause. 'Your advice is, I daresay, good advice. But it is advice I have heard before. That is unluckily just what Eustace recommended me to do.'

'And why did you not do it?'

'Because I don't believe Miss Hardwick would listen to me.'

'Frank, you know nothing about it,' said Essie, with all the importance of an authority. 'She *would* listen to you. You go down and take her by surprise, and say what I have told you. And she will listen to you. I am sure of it; because if I liked a man, and he had behaved to me as you have behaved to Lily, and then he were to come to me and

say what I have told you to say, I know *I* should listen to him and forgive him.'

That was certainly a strong argument.

Still, however, Warrington repeated, a little doggedly,

'Possibly. Still, I tell you fairly, I am not going.'

Essie drew her arm out of his, and said,

'Look here, Frank, do you know that you are very tiresome?'

Warrington lighted a cigarette, and they walked on together a little way in silence. After all, it was Essie, not Warrington, that had come near to losing her temper.

In his heart Warrington felt a little for her, although she had certainly taken upon herself to interfere in what was not

her business. She had meant kindly, and she had given what was possibly good advice. If it had only happened not to be the one thing he was resolved not to do.

But suddenly Essie stopped short.

'Frank,' she said, turning and facing him, 'I'll not be humbugged. You ought to go to Lynham and you shall!'

'I'm afraid not, Essie.'

'Yes—you *shall* go. I'll make you. I've spoken to you kindly and nicely,'—she walked on as she continued—'I have told you that I would be your friend and help you. I have said to you just what your own sister would have said. And you ought to do as I have told you. But if you won't, do you know what you are?—a nasty, selfish, ill-natured wretch! Oh, yes, I mean it,' she continued, com-

ing nearer him and giving him a positively savage little slap on his shoulder. 'If you don't go down to Lynham and see Lily, you are a nasty, selfish, hard-hearted wretch. Listen, Frank; I don't want to think you are the sort of man to be cruel to a girl—cruel, you hear what I say, don't you—cruel! nor that you have a mean, contemptible pride that can't confess itself to have been in the wrong. But, cousin, do you know how you are behaving to the girl you say you love?'

It was not the sort of speech a man would be likely to answer, and Warrington did not answer it. He simply went on smoking his cigarette.

'Do you remember, Frank, when I helped Vi to get away from you?'

'I do,' said Warrington.

'Perhaps you remember how you felt that day, and what you thought of Vi—and of how she had behaved to you.'

'Perhaps I do,' admitted Warrington.

'And it does not occur to you that *you* are behaving far worse to Lily Hardwick than Vi behaved to you? Vi was a girl, and kept the truth from you, a man; and you, a man, are keeping the truth from Lily. Vi did not love you, but you say that you love Lily. All that came of Vi's deception was that you escaped from marrying a woman who would never have made your life happy. The consequence of *your* deception is that Lily Hardwick is breaking her heart. Vi had a motive, bad enough; that she was ready to do anything to escape from grandpapa. But you have no motive, Frank, but your own pride. And if Vi was mean to let you

believe she loved you when she didn't, and to encourage you to love her and then to jilt you; what, pray, are you, who will neither let a girl you love know that you love her, nor undeceive her in her belief that her love is returned with indifference, but coolly look on, and to see her break her heart? If you suffered, what do you think Lily is suffering—we women love more than you do.'

Warrington dropped his eyes, and looked down.

In an instant Essie had stepped up to him, and put her hand on his shoulder.

'Frank!'

'I will think of what you have said, Essie. I will, really.'

'I knew you would,' said the girl.

Late in the evening, after dinner, he came across the drawing-room to her, when she was playing the piano.

As she saw him approach, she leaned a little towards him, without ceasing to play.

Bending to her ear, he said,

'You will not tell anyone?'

'No.'

'I'll go down to Lynham to-morrow.'

CHAPTER VIII.

Warrington was a little surprised the next morning to find on his breakfast-table a note from Essie, enclosing one of her cards.

'Use my name without hesitation, if it can be of any use to you,' ran the note. 'Say that I sent you to inquire after Lily, because I could get no answer to my letters; or anything else of that kind that may prove of service to you. And *bon voyage*.'

He set out by an early train, arrived

at Lynham about noon, and had luncheon at the 'London Hotel.'

It was with mixed feelings of apprehension and anticipation that he, after luncheon, lighted a cigar, and directed his steps towards Cliff Cottage. Could it be really true that he was on his way to make a proposal of marriage to Miss Hardwick? The thing seemed impossible. But a thousand reminiscences of her filled his brain.

Would he, as his cousin predicted, succeed in rectifying the consequence of his mistakes? How would he find Miss Hardwick? The better for his absence? Disposed to pardon him? Or already fairly advanced with the task of forgetting him? He answered himself in conjectures of all kinds. But, of the things men say to themselves, they believe the good and dis-

believe the bad, and so are, after all, very little wiser for their reflections.

The familiar gate of Cliff Cottage came in view, the pines, and the little thatched cottage, covered with creepers, nestling among them. It seemed to Warrington a long time since he had last been at the spot. He entered, and passed down the short drive, recalling casually Eustace's queer dream of the place being turned to desolation. The reality was a contrast to the dream. The garden was bright as ever with flowers, and in a condition of the most exquisite neatness.

But, when he reached the porch, he found a little card fastened to the handle of the bell, with the request, 'Please do not ring.' And the knocker was wrapped in wash-leather.

Warrington stood looking blankly at

the muffled knocker. For the moment, the shock of the surprise had paralysed his thoughts.

'Miss Hardwick must be very ill,' he said to himself, with misgiving. Then he knocked gently.

After all, it might not be Miss Hardwick. Mrs. Gainsborough might be ill, or some one staying in the house.

He knocked lightly, and waited. Some time elapsed, and no one came. He began to doubt whether he had been heard. At last, however, the door was opened by a maid-servant of Mrs. Gainsborough's whom he recognised.

'Is Mrs. Gainsborough at home?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'You have some one ill in the house.'

'Miss Hardwick, sir.'

It was as he feared, then!

'Indeed. I have been away in town. She was not well when I left There has been no improvement in her health?' He hardly knew what he was saying.

'Oh, no, sir. Miss Hardwick has been sinking for many weeks,' said the girl.

'Is she in danger?'

'Oh, yes, sir. The doctor gives no hopes, sir.'

The girl made her answers as if she was quite tired of repeating the same thing to different people.

'Mrs. Gainsborough is at home?' asked Warrington.

'Oh, yes, sir.'

'Do you suppose I could see her?'

'If you will come in, sir, I'll see. Mis'ss sees very few visitors.'

Still the same tone of an oft-repeated answer.

Warrington entered, and was shown into the drawing-room. He kept the servant waiting a few minutes whilst he made some more inquiries respecting Miss Hardwick: how long it was since she had been able to go out? whether Dr. Gregg was still attending her? and so forth. Then the girl leaving him went to seek her mistress.

Warrington stood with his back to the hearth, and thought. How familiar the room seemed! The old escritoire, the little writing-table with its ormolu ornaments, the cosy low chairs, the feminine trifles, the round table strewn with books, the fresh sweet flowers.

And so the doctor gave no hopes. Was it possible? In this very house Lily Hard-

wick lay dying. Could it be possible? Did women, when they really loved, break their hearts for a man in this way, and lie down and die? Had he really wrecked this girl's life? He would never forgive himself.

A miserable load of disquiet, a species of moral and mental suffocation oppressed him, and made his thought slow and laboured.

He waited a long time, half-an-hour or more, moving restlessly about the room, unable to sit still, continually revolving, painfully, anxiously, the same train of thoughts.

Had he come too late? Would they let him see her? Was the girl really dying? Had he really broken her heart?

The servant returned.

Mrs. Gainsborough sent him her compli-

ments and hoped that he would excuse her not seeing him. Miss Hardwick was so very ill this morning.

A reasonable request enough of Mrs. Gainsborough's.

But he was loth to go.

He sent the servant back with another message. Would she kindly tell Mrs. Gainsborough that he was sorry to seem importunate. But he had come down from London on purpose to hear how Miss Hardwick was. Friends of Miss Hardwick's had sent him. They were most anxious to know all they could about her. In fact, he had promised them to see Miss Hardwick. If that was impossible, he begged that Mrs. Gainsborough would see him; would herself let him hear what he was to say to Miss Hardwick's friends. He did not mind how long he waited, or, if

Mrs. Gainsborough would name any time when it would be more convenient for her to see him, he would call again.

So the servant went to see.

She returned in a few minutes.

Mrs. Gainsborough was very sorry, but she hoped he would excuse her. Miss Hardwick was so very ill.

It seemed there was nothing to be done but to leave.

He laid two cards of his own on the table; and the one of Essie Chesterfield's.

'I wish I had brought Essie with me,' he said to himself as he put the cards down. 'I don't feel at all sure I am doing right to leave without seeing anyone.'

And he walked to the door slowly, as if waiting for some idea to occur to him before he reached it.

'Will you, please, give my compliments to Mrs. Gainsborough,' he said, stopping, and speaking slowly: 'and tell her how exceedingly sorry I am to learn that Miss Hardwick is so very ill; and that I regret that Mrs. Gainsborough could not see me. I suppose there is no hope of her seeing me if I wait, is there?'

'Mrs. Gainsborough is very sorry, sir, but I was to beg you to excuse her, because Miss Hardwick is so very ill.'

'You will, please, give her my message,' said Warrington.

And he passed into the hall.

'That girl is well trained to repeat what she is told,' he said to himself: 'but it seems that I must go back to town having effected nothing. I wish I had had Essie with me?'

In the drive he paused, and looked

back at the cottage. Which was *her* window? In which room of the house was it that she lay dying? He had no means of guessing. He turned and went back to Lynham.

Was it possible that this girl was really dying? Did girls break their hearts, and die like this?

The pretty girl she was! And a nice girl, too. A good-hearted girl, and a spirited little thing. The pluck with which she would go at a fence, or a brook, or anything if she was once persuaded that she could manage it. And now dying!

What would he not give to see her and to tell her—even if she were dying—that he had loved her all the time.

He had never known it as he knew now: now that he was to lose her; now that he

was never to see her face again. His darling dying. Yes: it was *his darling* that was dying.

There was a dull pain in his breast; of the sort that comes to strong men when forced to face the impending of a great, inevitable grief.

He was sure that he ought not to have let himself be turned out of the house by the maid-servant, without insisting on seeing Mrs. Gainsborough at last. But what could he do?'

He went into Lynham and called on Dr. Gregg. The doctor was out. Warrington waited to see him, and had the grim satisfaction of hearing from the surgeon's own lips that there was no hope of Miss Hardwick's recovery. She had been slowly sinking for weeks. The wonder was that she was still alive.

From the doctor's house Warrington went straight to the station, and returned to town and to Twickenham.

As he crossed the hall, Essie rushed out of the drawing-room to meet him.

'Well?' she exclaimed, with a bright smile on her face that faded as her eyes met his.

'Miss Hardwick is dying.'

'Dying!' exclaimed Essie, with consternation. 'You have seen her?'

'No.'

'You have *not* seen her! But——'

'Come into the library, and I will tell you all about it,' said Warrington.

When he had concluded, he said,

'I wish you had been with me, Essie.'

'Yes. I would have seen her,' remarked

Essie, with a certain determination. 'But, if she is dying, Frank, it could not have done much good.'

CHAPTER IX.

The doctor, as he had told Warrington, could hold out no hopes.

Indeed, everyone at Lynham was only waiting from day to day to hear of the anticipated end. Lily herself, an emaciated wreck, prostrate, pallid, and almost lifeless, for hours together unable to lift her head from her pillow, was almost weary enough to wish that the end might come.

After Warrington and his brother went away to town, Maud Gainsborough had taken, morally speaking, a look around

her. The result of her survey of the situation was an assurance that no further impediment lay in her way; and that she might proceed to the destruction of her cousin with that quiet deliberation which she had always regarded as the safest and surest way of accomplishing her end.

For a fortnight Lily still went out of doors. She even went twice into the town. But on the second occasion she was taken faint, and had to be brought home. After that she did not go farther than the garden. Soon her walks in the garden became shortened. She could no longer get so far as the top of the cliff: soon only half-way down the garden, and back; then no further than the chestnuts, and the tennis lawn.

The decline of her forces was slow and

extremely irregular. One day she would walk three or four times as far as on the preceding. The next day she was scarcely able to crawl a few yards. Getting up in the morning was always a terrible task. She was invariably dizzy on rising, and during dressing would lie down two or three times to rest.

Even on her best days—that was when the widow had given her a smaller dose of the drug, or suppressed one dose, or even both—she would lie for hours on the sofa, or recline in a lounging-chair, indisposed for the least exertion, often complaining of headache, and almost invariably a prey to an indescribable dejection. The least thing made her cry, and the most trivial emotion brought into her face either a sudden flush or an equally sudden deadly pallor.

By-and-by there was no more walking in the garden. Only all the long, summer afternoons her chair was put by the open drawing-room window, and she lay there still, and with wistful, hollow eyes looked at the sunshine and the slowly-moving shadows, and the trees and the flowers, and the dappled lawn,—all so near and yet all gone out of reach of her failing strength.

Sometimes, when she went upstairs, on reaching her room she dropped on her bed breathless and exhausted. The head-aches, too, became worse—terrible head-aches, day after day, intolerable, maddening.

'Oh, Maud,' she would wail, 'this is insufferable. I shall go mad. I would rather die than this. It is harder to live in such awful pain than to die any death.'

Quoth Mrs. Gainsborough to herself on these occasions,

'I am putting her out of her pain as fast as I can. How impatient she grows.'

Now and then the widow gave her a larger dose. Then she lay for hours perfectly motionless, unable to raise her head from her pillow.

And all the time, day by day, she became paler and thinner, more disheartened and more fatally prostrated.

Everyone was very kind. She had plenty of visitors. Indeed, she had too many visitors. But it was not Mrs. Gainsborough's aim to exclude visitors. Mrs. Gainsborough invited the greatest publicity for her cousin's slow decline. So Lily's girl-friends came to see her, to chat with her, and to try to cheer her.

The rector's wife and other good souls of the neighbourhood came, and brought her presents of all sorts of little dainties to tempt her appetite. Sometimes she was equal to seeing them, and sometimes not. If she could see them, she exerted herself to be at her best, at any rate to keep in subjection the senseless tears that were always ready to flow for nothing; and she would thank them for the presents, and for coming to see her, and promise to eat what they brought—if she could. But it was seldom that anything got eaten. Food in any shape had become an impossibility to her. Among other people, Sir Robert called with his wife. Saying good-bye to him, Lily fairly broke down.

'I shall never ride to hounds again, Sir Robert,' she said, with her hand on

his, and then, quickly turning away, burst into a flood of tears. The bluff baronet was scarcely master of himself when parting with Mrs. Gainsborough in the hall.

Then one day Maud Gainsborough had a fright.

Lily ran rather rapidly upstairs and fell down in a dead faint.

For an hour or two Mrs. Gainsborough believed this was the end. And she did not want the end just yet. She had one or two things to do before the end came. However, after about an hour-and-a-half the girl revived a little. And the widow, for a day or two, diminished her dose.

But she took warning from the alarm, and delayed her last precautions no longer.

She insisted on a consultation.

So Dr. Gregg brought a friend with him, and they spent more than an hour with Lily. Lily was a trifle better that day. Dr. Gregg insisted on the affection of the heart, and the stethescope, on being used, revealed a distinct murmur. That was no great wonder, considering the girl's anœmic condition. So the murmur passed for a valvular murmur, and the doctor's colleague corroborated his opinion of heart complaint. In fact, the two medical men were much agreed about the whole case. It mattered little to Maud Gainsborough whether they were so or not. She had had her consultation, and she would take care to talk about it.

The doctors were perfectly welcome to try any new treatment and prescriptions. She felt no anxiety about their ability to

neutralize the effect of judiciously administered aconite.

When she went upstairs to Lily, after they had left, the girl asked eagerly,

'What did the doctors say, Maud?'

'They give us no hope, dear.'

'Oh! Maud,' exclaimed the girl, with despair.

After a few seconds she added, 'It is an awful thing to have to die, Maud.'

'Well, you must be resigned, dear,' replied the widow, in a mechancial sort of tone.

'I do try to be resigned,' said the girl, gently. 'But it is not so easy as you seem to think. And, do you know, Maud, you say things to one awfully cruelly sometimes.'

In the evening Maud Gainsborough said to herself,

'Now we have done with the consultation, the next thing is to write to Mr. Tanner.'

So she wrote to Mr. Tanner, a long rambling letter, that contained an enormous number of words, and yet said nothing at all: a letter full of harrowing descriptions of Maud's own heart-broken consternation and dismay at the discovery of the terribly serious condition of her 'poor darling,' and at the impossibility of hoping any longer 'even against hope.' Cleverly mingled with all these lamentations were scraps of what the doctors had said, and many confused explanations of why Maud had not written sooner, 'all along she had been believing, trusting, praying that the case might not be really so very serious,' —and ever so much more of the same sort. About the only thing really clear in this

beautiful epistle was, that if either Mr. or Mrs. Tanner wished to see Lily Hardwick alive, they must come down to Lynham at once.

Upon Lily Hardwick's guardian and his wife the letter fell like a thunderbolt.

'I can't go to see her, Tom,' said Mrs. Tanner, when her husband read the widow's letter aloud. 'I'm sure it would break my heart. But do you go.'

Yes. Mr. Tanner would go. There was no doubt about that. And he would make Mrs. Gainsborough know what he thought. Very angry indeed was Mr. Tanner.

And the next day Mr. Tanner came down to Lynham. Lily was much worse than she had been when the medical men had seen her; in fact, she was worse than Mrs. Gainsborough meant her to be on the

occasion of Mr. Tanner's visit. And Mr. Tanner was immensely shocked, as well he might be. Lily seemed scarcely to know what was going on, and bade her guardian good-bye in a sort of semi-conscious dream, but she sent her love to Mrs. Tanner, and begged him to thank her for all her kindness.

Altogether a very unpleasant business was this visit of Mr. Tanner's. Mr. Tanner asked no end of questions, and was disposed to be terribly angry. He told Mrs. Gainsborough point-blank that it was a disgraceful thing that his ward had been suffered to become so ill without his having known anything at all about it: and he was very imperfectly pacified by the widow's assurance that she had had no suspicion of the seriousness of her cousin's condition until after the consultation that took place a

few days before. Also Mrs. Gainsborough asserted that she had employed the best medical skill available in the neighbourhood. And she had the courage to suggest that, if Mr. Tanner was dissatisfied, he should himself send down some celebrated man from London. Her heart flinched as she made the proposition, for she could see that Mr. Tanner was half inclined to act upon it. But in the end he left, dissatisfied enough, but satisfied that everything that could be done for the girl had been done, and insisting only on hearing from Mrs. Gainsborough every day.

Very thankful was Maud Gainsborough to see him depart.

'If I had let him know that Lily was ill as soon as he would have liked, I should never have been able to finish this at all,' she said to herself. 'Now

I have done with everything but the finale.'

Already Lily was confined to her room: in a day or two more, to her bed.

She lay now for hours together, like a log, motionless, and apparently incapable of moving. Existence seemed to have reached the lowest point at which its continuation was possible: and her life hung by a thread. The widow had reduced her doses, one of those which the girl had not so long before been taking twice a day would have proved fatal now. Visitors still came to see her, and Mrs. Gainsborough from time to time admitted one of them, that people might see for themselves what was going on, but more often excused even herself from seeing them. Lily seemed scarcely to notice them, and was often apparently unconscious of their

presence. Now and then she rallied a little, generally only to complain piteously of insufferable pain or exhaustion. But at other times she would have Maud Gainsborough summoned, and—utterly unsuspecting of the truth—throw herself into her arms, clinging with wild yearning and clasping with weak arms the last thing left within her reach, in a world fast slipping away from her grasp.

Maud Gainsborough endured the embraces and endearments, and responded with kisses to the feeble, fondling words. To do so was politic. She no longer shrank from such scenes, though they bored her enormously. The long weeks employed in the merciless murder of the girl had hardened her, and made her completely callous to what she was doing. She suffered no longer from shocks and

revulsions. She had no need now to go down on the beach, and to walk up and down, up and down, by the sea because she could not rest. If she went out, it was simply because being in the house with her sick cousin bored her.

Unexpectedly one afternoon Lily began to talk about Warrington. She had been asking questions about all the people who had recently been to see her or to inquire after her, and then she said,

'And Mr. Warrington, he has never been?'

'He is in town, you know.'

'I know. But he has never sent any message?'

'No.'

Lily heaved a sigh.

'Maud,' she said, 'I should like to see Mr. Warrington. Now that I am going

to die, it cannot much matter what passed between us. And perhaps I was too hard on him. I wish I could see him, I should like to tell him that I am still his friend. Last time I parted from him, I only bowed and would not speak. I should like it better if we could part friends.'

Maud Gainsborough made some remark about the exceeding unlikelihood of a visit from Warrington, who, in the first place, was in town, and whom, in the second place, Lily had herself chosen to cut.

'I know, Maud,' said the girl. 'But if he knew how ill I am: and if he knew that I wished to see him, I think he would come.'

And presently she went on,

'He might come even yet, Maud. If he does, you will let him see me, won't

you, however ill I am? Even if he has to wait a whole day, you will make him wait. Maud, I loved him so! If he comes, you *will* let me see him—you will keep him here till I can see him? You promise me, Maud.'

'Yes, I promise it, if you wish it.'

The girl lifted up her pale lips and kissed her.

If Mrs. Gainsborough had been superstitious, she might have imagined the sick girl inspired with some presentiment of coming events, for it was the very day after this that Warrington called. But how Maud kept her promise is known.

CHAPTER X.

Maud Gainsborough sat musing.

She had reached a point where she might now any day destroy her cousin without raising a shadow of a suspicion. And Dr. Gregg would sign the certificate without a moment's hesitation.

And she was going to do it.

Would a day ever come when, with her head resting on Frank Warrington's breast, she would be able proudly to confide to him what she had gone through, what she had dared, to win him? Would

he understand her, appreciate the measurelessness of her passion, the infatuation of her devotion?

The widow feared he would not. It was an unsatisfactory confession to make to herself that the man for whom a woman could have dared all this was a man from whom she could never venture to ask the meed of her measureless love. But—men have no poetry. They are so simple-minded. They never see how circumstances modify acts, and hastily call everything by the first name that comes to hand.

Of course, at present Frank Warrington was in love with the little fool upstairs, and would call what Maud had done—murder.

But, perhaps, by-and-by——

No. Maud would not deceive herself.

It would never do to tell Frank Warrington. She had gauged his character, and there was not poetry enough in it to understand a tragedy. All the perils she had boldly faced, all the horrors she had waded through, all the courage she had found, all the nerve, and skill, and intelligence she had displayed, they must all be for ever buried in the depth of her own breast—never confessed to the man for whom she had staked everything.

'And these men are the things we love, and cannot help ourselves,' quoth Maud.

But she took a resolution. To-morrow Lily should be much worse, and to-morrow night should die.

To-morrow!—And the game was lost already.

For that same morning Warrington received a letter. Eustace had left the hospital, and the brothers were both of them at Twickenham. Coming down to breakfast, Warrington found amongst the letters awaiting him one from Lynham, in a lady's handwriting entirely unknown to him.

Within it was a short note in another hand, written with a pencil.

'Dear Mr. Warrington,

'You must forgive this scrawl, which I write in bed with a pencil, because my cousin would not like me to write. But Miss Barrington kindly promises to post this for me. I am very ill, and they tell me I must die, and I should so like to see you, to beg your pardon, if I have not always behaved to you as I should,

and to part friends. I spoke to Maud only the day before yesterday about your coming, and she promised me solemnly that, if by any chance you called, you should certainly see me. Do please come.

'Ever your faithful friend,

'LILY HARDWICK.

'Wednesday afternoon.'

The letter was indeed a scrawl, a sad scrawl, written with a trembling hand that seemed to have found a difficulty in holding the pencil.

Warrington read it twice: and then his eyes fixed on the date: 'Wednesday afternoon.'

Presumably Miss Barrington—he had met her in the hunting-field—had in the course of Thursday gone to Lynhurst, and got his address from the housekeeper, and

posted the letter in Lynham for the London evening post. The postmarks agreed with that.

But it was on Tuesday that he went down to Lynham, and Lily Hardwick, writing on Wednesday, spoke of a promise given her 'the day before yesterday.' That was on Monday. Then, on Monday Mrs. Gainsborough gave her a solemn promise that, if by any chance Warrington came to call, he should certainly see her. On Tuesday Warrington did call, and certainly did not see her. And on Wednesday she wrote, plainly ignorant of his having called, 'Do come.'

That he would certainly do. But the dates seemed to be all contradictions.

While he still stood with the letter in his hand, Essie came into the breakfast-room.

'Good-morning, Frank,' she said; and then, in another tone, 'Why! what is the matter?'

'Read,' said Warrington, handing her the letter.

'But when was this written?' asked Essie, turning the letter about. 'Wednesday. Then — then, the day before yesterday—that is Monday.'

She looked up at Warrington, and their eyes met in a look of reciprocal interrogation.

'You will go, Frank?'

'Certainly.'

At breakfast, Warrington mentioned that unanticipated business would take him away for the day. He was taciturn and preoccupied.

When breakfast was over, Essie seized an opportunity to speak to him.

'I have been thinking of nothing but that letter, Frank,' she said. 'It is most mysterious. Did Mrs. Gainsborough, on Monday, promise Lily that she should see you, but, when you came, change her mind?'

'After her promise? And what for?'

'Well, Frank, I have misgivings,' observed Essie. 'Suppose Mrs. Gainsborough has not chosen that you should see Lily? Then you go down again to-day. And she has given orders, perhaps, that you are not to be admitted. What are you going to do then?'

'But all this is most unlikely,' retorted Warrington.

'But—if it happens,' insisted Essie. 'Listen, Frank. Last time you went down you wished that you had taken me with you. This time will you take my

advice?—show that letter to Uncle Tony.'

'To Mr. Gainsborough? What for?' demanded Warrington, who saw no reason for the proposition.

'Uncle Tony knows Mrs. Gainsborough better than you do, and he will read between the lines.'

Warrington demurred.

'It would be necessary to tell him all that history, you see,' he objected.

'I will tell him that, or as much as he will need to know. You can have no reason for hesitating to put every confidence in Uncle Tony. Frank, be persuaded.'

'But this is probably merely some mistake, you know. You see,'—he spoke with pain—'how ill Miss Hardwick is.'

'That is a mere presumption of yours.

Think, Frank, if I should be right, what that means; Lily will never see you.'

'And what difference will showing the letter to Mr. Gainsborough make?'

'You show him the letter, and see.'

Warrington yielded to her persuasion at last, saying,

'Go and speak to Mr. Gainsborough then while I see my brother.'

When he returned downstairs, Essie and Anthony Gainsborough were in the library.

'Where is this letter of yours, Warrington?' asked Anthony Gainsborough. 'May I see it?'

He had, as usual, his pipe in his mouth, which he always smoked after breakfast, but there was a shadow on his face, an expression of cloudy displeasure and of profound mistrust that contrasted so

strangely with his invariably genial, open mien that Warrington regarded him with unconcealed surprise.

'Read, by all means,' he said, offering the letter.

And, at the same time, he looked interrogatively at Essie, who sat by the table, as if he would say, 'What does this mean?'

Essie, for answer, only shook her head; which explained nothing.

As Anthony Gainsborough read the letter the shadow on his face deepened.

'What is your explanation of this letter, Warrington?' he asked, in a short, hard voice, still holding the note in his hand.

'Essie has told you the facts, I believe. I imagine that the letter simply contains some mistake. Miss Hardwick is evi-

dently very ill, and I conceive that she has confused the days.'

'It is possible,' said Anthony Gainsborough, in a sceptical tone, and continued: 'only, why should Mrs. Gainsborough not like Miss Hardwick to write to you?'

'I don't know. Unless it was because she was afraid of Miss Hardwick's overexerting herself.'

'That does not explain her having recourse to the assistance of a friend to post her letter,' remarked Anthony Gainsborough, coolly.

Then suddenly turning he said, angrily,

'Mark you, Warrington, if that woman promised the girl on Monday that you should see her if you came, and when you came, on Tuesday, broke her word—broke a promise solemnly given to a dying girl

that she should see her lover: that was a wickedly cruel thing—and I shall know what she meant by it.'

How strange the words sounded, and how strange their harsh, almost savage tone from the lips of this quiet, good-natured, easy-tempered man! Warrington and Essie exchanged a look of surprise, as well they might, and each of them secretly asked themselves what all this could mean.

'I think it more likely that there has been some mistake,' said Warrington.

'Let us hope so. Only if that woman has broken a promise solemnly given to a dying girl that she should see her lover; that is a wickedly cruel thing; and I shall know what she means by it.'

He spoke very quietly this time, in his ordinary even voice, but with a certain

firm determination that had a most ominous ring.

Essie sat silent, her eyes going from one of the men to another.

'I don't think that Mrs. Gainsborough is the sort of woman to do a thing like that, you know,' observed Warrington.

'What have you seen of her character?' asked Mr. Gainsborough.

'Well—something.'

'What she has chosen to show you,' said Anthony Gainsborough, in a brusque, harsh voice, most unlike his ordinary tone. 'The woman's a liar. Oh! I know her. She's a liar.'

He was walking up and down the room slowly, as he often did whilst he was smoking. Presently he asked,

'Of course you are going down?'

'At once.'

'And you will insist upon seeing Miss Hardwick?'

'I shall attempt to do so.'

'Yes,' said Anthony Gainsborough. 'And if Mrs. Gainsborough refuses to let you see her'—he stopped in his walk and turned towards Warrington—'you telegraph on the spot to me. *I'll* make her let you see Miss Hardwick.'

He went on to the end of the room, and there stopped again.

'I know this woman better than you do, Warrington,' he said, quietly. 'But I don't want to prejudice anyone. I shall be very happy to learn that your explanation is the right one; that there is simply some mistake. It is just possible. But if Mrs. Gainsborough refuses to let you see Miss Hardwick—you telegraph to me. Don't insist. Don't waste your time.

Don't do anything. Turn straight from the door and go to the telegraph-office. Telegraph to me, "Refused," and I'll *make* Mrs. Gainsborough let you see the girl. And I'll know what she means by refusing you, too. Now, don't let me keep you. Be off. And I hope you'll find your lady-love better than you anticipate. If you do, give her my kind regards. She is a charming girl.'

And he gave Warrington his great hand, and shook hands with him heartily.

In the hall Warrington said to Essie,

'You were right, Essie.'

'I mostly am, Frank,' replied Essie.

When he was gone, Essie returned to her uncle. He was still smoking in the library.

'It is my opinion, Uncle Tony, that you would have done better if you had gone

down with Frank. I don't believe that there is any mistake at all. Lily very seldom made mistakes. Mrs. Gainsborough simply does not want Frank to see her.'

'On what do you ground that?' asked her uncle.

'On the fact that Lily was evidently not allowed to write to him. That must mean something, and may mean anything.'

'You are quite right.'

He was filling another pipe. That was unusual. After his one pipe after breakfast he generally went about his day's work.

'That woman has had too much money to spend lately,' he remarked, lighting the pipe. 'And I daresay she has been getting too much of her own way. I know

her. Still I don't wish to prejudge the matter. We will hope for the best. It may be a mistake.'

The hours of the morning passed quietly.

Anthony Gainsborough had been going into town, but did not go. All the forenoon he strolled about the house, and the lawn in front of the house.

About twelve, Essie found that an order had been given for the dog-cart to be got out, and to be kept standing in readiness to start at any minute. Violet was in the drawing-room, playing to Eustace. Essie went out in the garden to get some flowers.

Presently her uncle came to her.

'How long will it take you to get ready to go out?' he asked.

'To go where?'

'To go anywhere.'

'A few minutes only. I have only to put on my hat and gloves.'

'Get ready, then.'

Essie went in and put on her hat, and put her gloves in her pocket, and returned to her flowers. When she came in again from the garden, Anthony Gainsborough was in the hall.

'Ah, you have your hat on. That is right,' he said. 'I have been thinking. And, if I have to go to Lynham, I may take you with me. I may want you there.'

'As you wish, uncle.'

What could he want her for?

She went into the breakfast-room to arrange her flowers. In the midst of her task, the housekeeper came in.

'Can I speak to you, miss?'

'Certainly, Mrs. Simpson.'

'What has happened, miss, if I may be so bold as to ask?'

'Why?'

'Mr. Warrington (I don't know whether you know it) is gone down to Lynham. John, who went with him to the railway-station, heard him ask for his ticket. I suppose he's going to see Mrs. Gainsborough, miss, isn't he?'

'Well, you see, you know, Mrs. Simpson,' observed Essie, evasively.

'But has anything happened down there, miss?'

'Nothing that I know of.'

'But'—in a lower voice—'is Mr. Gainsborough going down, miss?'

'Perhaps.'

'You are going with him, miss?'

'Perhaps: if he goes. Why?'

'Well, miss, if there's anything

wrong down there, this time you'll see.'

'See what?'

'What you will see, miss.'

And the old woman left with a knowing nod.

What did she mean?

A quarter-to two.

Anthony Gainsborough, still strolling about the place, crossed Essie coming out of the breakfast-room.

'Keep about; be in the hall, or in the drawing-room,' he said.

And he went out to walk up and down before the house. The dog-cart had been brought round, and stood by the front-door.

Suddenly a shout like a clap of thunder echoed through the hall into the drawing-room.

'Essie!'

Essie rushed into the hall. Anthony Gainsborough was already in the dog-cart. He had met the boy with the telegram in the drive. Essie ran down the steps, and sprang up beside him. She was hardly in her seat before he put the horse into a gallop with a sharp cut of his whip.

The dog-cart swung out of the gate, and then dashed along the road towards Surbiton.

'If we are lucky, we shall catch the express,' said Anthony Gainsborough, at the same time pushing a telegram into her hands.

It contained one word only, 'Refused.'

Essie thought of the old housekeeper, and her remark, 'You'll see, miss—what you will see.'

The old woman was right. She was

going to see what sort of thing is 'the wrath of the dove,' the awful anger of a tender-hearted man.

CHAPTER XI.

The windows of Lily's room stood open. A soft breeze from seawards stole in through them, cool and fresh, with the scent of the waves. Outside there was brilliant sunshine. The September day was hot. But this side of the cottage stood in the shade.

In her bed the poisoned girl lay motionless, with her eyelids closed, to all appearance unconscious. Only her breast heaved irregularly as she laboured for breath. Her thin arms were drawn away

from her body a little to the right and left. The doctor had put them so, to make her breathing more easy. Her head was bent on one side. The sheets were hardly more white than her wasted face and cheeks, but her beautiful hair lay tumbled in disorder on her pillow, and the long fringes of her eyelashes, and the two rows of perfectly even, pearly teeth between her colourless lips, contrasted with her deathlike appearance—young womanhood's sweetest freshness, with the last stage of decay.

The simple, tasteful room was a little in disorder, and unlike what it used to be. It was a long time since she was able to attend to it, and all that Maud Gainsborough or the servants had done wanted the grace of her touch. There were a few flowers on the table by the bed. She

loved the flowers, and had asked for them only this morning; but before they came she was too ill to see them—or they would not have remained so ill-assorted as they were. Beside them lay a little book of devotions.

Dr. Gregg stood by the bed looking on. Looking on was the only thing left that could be done.

And a little behind him, pretending to be watching, but really with averted eyes, looking at the sunshine out of doors, was Maud Gainsborough, sitting sideways in her chair, with her handkerchief pressed against her lips. She was pale, and her face bore an expression of weariness, but there was a strange gleam of living light in the depths of her eyes, and her handsome face, haggard as it was, had a weird, unnatural beauty, such as might have

served for the portrait of a sorceress of antiquity, broken by the exhaustion of some ghastly rite. In the pocket of her dress she had in a tiny phial a few last drops of poison, enough, in fact, to destroy three or four stalwart lives. All the rest she had this morning thrown away, saving the contents of the bottle in the old escritoire downstairs.

'She is sinking,' said the doctor.

Maud Gainsborough wonders whether that is really so. It might be. This morning's dose might, in the girl's weak condition, be final, without the other one she proposes to give in the evening.

'You can do nothing, doctor?' she asked.

'Nothing. She is sinking. You should telegraph for her friends, Mrs. Gains-

borough, if there are any whom you wish her to see.'

'There would be no one to telegraph to but her guardian; he came to see her last week, and bade her good-bye.'

Rising, she came to the bed, and, bending over the girl, kissed her on her forehead.

'My poor darling! So young, doctor! She is only twenty. This is very terrible.'

There were real tears in her eyes. The last drop—it would be an awesome deed to give that: and the hours were speeding towards it; and she was a little unnerved. Now, too, in the last extremity of the poor, shattered life, some of the pity for the girl which she had felt at first had returned.

The doctor left, and Maud Gains-

borough moved to the window seat. It would have been a relief to her to leave the room, but appearances had to be considered. So she sat by the window, where she could not see the pale girl in her bed, and where she could not herself be seen by anyone coming to the house.

Downstairs the housemaid Ann was turning away all visitors and messages of inquiry with the same answer:

'Mrs. Gainsborough cannot see anyone. Miss Hardwick is dying.'

Ann had been crying.

Towards one Mrs. Gainsborough came downstairs. The cook took her place for a time, with instructions immediately to summon her mistress if Miss Hardwick should be any worse. She would not be any worse, Maud knew very well.

Already, on the contrary, she was breathing a trifle more easily. The first fierce effects of the virulent but transitory poison were passing off. By-and-by, towards the end of the afternoon, Lily would open her eyes, and become conscious. In the evening she would be able to take something—and, an hour or two after that, she would be out of the reach of everything in this world for evermore.

'Well! What must be, must be!'

So Maud went downstairs and sat in the dining-room and watched Ann laying luncheon.

Another knock. Ann went to answer it, leaving the dining-room door open behind her.

Mrs. Gainsborough bent her ear to catch, if she could, the voice of the visitor.

Suddenly she started. The voice was Warrington's!

'Is Mrs. Gainsborough at home?' he asked.

'Mrs. Gainsborough cannot see anyone, sir.—Miss Hardwick is dying.'

'I *must* see Mrs. Gainsborough.'

He spoke with authority, and the words reached Maud in the dining-room clearly.

'Mrs. Gainsborough has given orders that she cannot see anyone, sir,' replied the servant.

'Take her my card. Tell her that I must see her. She knows that it is important. I will wait here.'

'What can he have come again for?' thought Maud to herself. 'And what does he mean by saying *I* know?'

Then the servant came in with the mes-

sage, and at a sign from Maud closed the door behind her.

'I can see no one, Ann. You must tell Mr. Warrington that Miss Hardwick is dying, and that I can see no one.'

The servant left. Would she succeed in getting rid of Warrington?

Ann returned.

'Is he gone, Ann?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'What did he say?'

'Nothing, ma'am. He just turned and walked away.'

Mrs. Gainsborough drew a long breath of relief. The widow was not the first woman who has drawn a sigh of relief on having finally succeeded in compassing her own destruction, nor will she be the last.

After luncheon, she again went upstairs,

and released the cook. When the cook was gone, she went to the bedside, and regarded Lily closely. She was not so much better as Mrs. Gainsborough had expected to find her at the end of the hour-and-a-half that she had been downstairs. The effect of her morning dose was passing off very slowly. The widow felt her pulse, and listened attentively to her breathing. That last dose must have come very near being fatal. Well, the next would be more certainly so: a good thing. It had been a horrible business, and had lasted a terrible time.

Downstairs the inquiries still continued. About half-past four Lily began to be a little restless. The doctor was to call again about five, or as soon as he could afterwards. How would Lily be when he came? Then the cook came up, and

urged her mistress to go downstairs and to have a cup of tea quietly.

'Do, ma'am, now; you're looking quite worn out.'

So Maud went downstairs, and had tea brought her in the dining-room. Afterwards she opened her work-basket, and began sorting out some silks for a piece of fancy work.

To-morrow! only to-morrow, all her dreams would be realised: the fifteen thousand a-year, and everything! She could not help thinking of it. To-morrow —only to-morrow! This had been a gruesome business with her cousin, and she had run some awful risks. But the prize! And now she had only to wait till to-morrow.

Another knock. More inquiries. With the silk in her hand, the widow suddenly

looks up and listens. Surely that is a man's step in the hall.

Ah, the doctor, of course. He has come a little before his time. That is a very good thing. Every half-hour Lily will be better just at present. And the sooner the doctor sees her the less difference he will find in her condition since the morning.

The door opened and Ann came in.

'Miss Essie Chesterfield, if you please, ma'am, and Mr. Anthony Gainsborough.'

Every drop of blood in Maud Gainsborough's body rushed to her heart.

'Who?' she gasped, catching her breath and staggering up from her seat as if she would fall.

'Miss Essie Chesterfield and Mr. Anthony Gainsborough.'

'Anthony Gainsborough! Anthony

Gainsborough!' replied Maud, in herself utterly unnerved, and instantly seized with some inconceivable alarm. 'What can Anthony be come about? What on earth is this? What can have brought him here, and of all days to-day?'

'You must tell them that I cannot see them, Ann,' she answered, nervously turning her back to the servant.

'I've told them so, ma'am,' said Ann.

'Then tell them again. I cannot see anyone. Where are they—at the door?'

'They are in the drawing-room, ma'am.'

'In the drawing-room! But I told you to let no one in.'

'I didn't let them in, ma'am. The gentleman asked, "Is Mrs. Gainsborough at home?" and I said, "Yes, sir." And then, before I had time to say any more, he walked straight in and went into the

drawing-room, and the young lady after him. And then, when I followed him and said you could not see anyone, ma'am, all he said was, "Go and tell your mistress that Miss Essie Chesterfield and Mr. Anthony Gainsborough are here."'

'Well, then, you must go and tell them again that I cannot see them.'

The servant left.

The instant the door closed behind her Maud Gainsborough, leaning back against the table, pressed both her hands on her heart.

What on earth was it that was the matter with her? Fear. Yes, abject, horrible fear! It was cowardly, miserable, but it was so. She was faint with ghastly, deadly fear. The one man in the whole wide world whose very name made her shudder, what was he come for to-day? What

could have brought him at this moment? She believed she saw it all. Something had transpired; somebody had suspected her, and somehow the thing had reached Anthony Gainsborough. If so, there was not a hope left for her. Oh, God in heaven!

CHAPTER XII.

MEANWHILE the housemaid went to the drawing-room.

Anthony Gainsborough had sat down. He had his elbow on the table at his side, and had crossed his legs. Essie stood by the window, looking at the lawn.

'If you please, sir, Mrs. Gainsborough is very sorry, but she cannot see anyone.'

'You tell your mistress, my girl, that if she does not come at once to see me, I shall come to see her,' replied Anthony Gainsborough, looking at the maid without the least concern.

And Ann departed, to take the message to her mistress.

Faint with terror, and pallid as death Maud heard it, and told the girl to leave her. Then she dropped into the nearest chair, and laid her head down on the table; but only to start up again the next minute.

What on earth was she to do?

In vain she cast about her for some loophole of escape. She could find none. Must she really go and face this awful man? And he perhaps had discovered what she had been doing? The tears came into her eyes for very terror.

Well, at any rate, the tears might help her.

And, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, she went to the drawing-room.

What must be, must be!

Anthony Gainsborough had risen and stood by the hearth. Essie was still at the window. Making her a slight bow, Maud Gainsborough went at once towards her brother-in-law, and feigned to take no notice of the fact that he did not offer his hand.

'Oh, Anthony,' she began, sinking into a chair, with a sob, 'I—I am in such trouble; my poor cousin is dying.'

One look in Anthony Gainsborough's face had sufficed to assure her that her very worst suspicions might, in all likelihood, be true. She was quivering from head to foot with abject terror, and sobbing like a child. It looked altogether very like wild grief, and it was wild fear.

'Miss Hardwick is dying?' demanded Anthony Gainsborough, in a cold hard voice.

'Oh, yes,' sobbed the widow; 'so the doctor says.'

'Do you know why I have come?' asked Anthony Gainsborough.

He spoke coldly, calmly; only in his voice there was an undertone, ominous, menacing, of terrific determination. Even Essie, standing by the window, but no longer regarding the flowers, looked round.

For an instant the widow raised her eyes, but only to cover her face again in her handkerchief. The room was turning round her. She could think distinctly of nothing.

'When you came to live here,' said Anthony Gainsborough, in the same tone, 'I told you not to use the liberty I left you, to be guilty of any more heartlessness. Do you remember?'

Maud answered nothing. She had buried her face on the back of the chair. To herself she was saying, 'He knows everything! He knows everything! Oh, my God!'

'A few days ago,' continued Anthony Gainsborough, 'you solemnly promised your cousin that, if Mr. Warrington came to see her, she should see him.'

Maud started. How on earth had he discovered that? There had been no one with herself and Lily when the promise had been given. And she had only yesterday asked Lily whether she had talked to anyone about it, and Lily had said, 'No.' And Lily spoke the truth. Had the man second-sight? And what was he coming to from this beginning?

'You promised your cousin that, if Mr. Warrington called, she certainly should

see him,' he repeated, in the same even, calm voice.

'But who told you?' asked the widow, beginning to think that she must be losing her wits.

Instead of answering, Anthony Gainsborough demanded,

'When Mr. Warrington called on Tuesday, why did you break the promise you had given?'

'She was not well enough to see him.'

'She saw other people; she saw Miss Barrington.'

There was no change in his voice; it was the same with which he had spoken throughout, soft, calm, perfectly undisturbed, but with a ring of quiet resolution that was more disconcerting.

As for the widow, she seemed to herself to have drifted into a world of sorcery.

This man knew everything. If the next thing he asked for was the bottle of aconite in her pocket, she would not be much more surprised than she was already.

Once more he was simply repeating his question, in the same quietly inexorable voice,

'You solemnly promised this dying girl that she should see her lover if he came. He came, and you broke your word. What did you mean by it?'

Slowly the truth was dawning on Maud. Anthony Gainsborough had come down furiously angry because she had not let her cousin see her lover. How he had found it out, God knew. But of all the rest he had no suspicion.

And she ventured to answer.

She meant nothing by it. Only Lily was so ill. The promise was not a *solemn*

promise. The promise had only been given the girl because she was so ill: to calm her. To keep her from exciting herself. She could not have borne to see Mr. Warrington. It would have been too much for her. True, she had seen Miss Barrington: that did not excite her. What had been done, had been done only out of kindness and consideration for the girl's health.

All this, and much more of the same sort, Maud said; growing a little voluble as she ran on, and perceived how plausible what she was saying sounded.

Only, at the end, Anthony Gainsborough answered,

'Very good. You know, I know you do not speak the truth. So, now that you have finished with all you wish to say, will you please to answer me what

you meant by breaking your promise?'

'I have told you the truth, and I don't know what more you want to know,' answered the widow, a little shortly.

She might have said, with more truth, that she did not care what he wanted to know. She certainly was not going to tell him that she was herself in love with Warrington, and resolved that he and Lily should not meet. Anthony Gainsborough would be in a passion, of course. He would turn her out of the cottage, and refuse to make her any farther allowance. And he might. A deal all that would matter to her to-morrow! And to-morrow Lily should be dead. Dead without a doubt; dead, without a shadow of pity; now that she had been bothered about her like this. She, Maud, would have her revenge for it. It was easy enough. And as for

Anthony Gainsborough, since he knew nothing at all of all she feared, he might stay and scold her as long as he pleased. He might stay all night: and, if he liked, take Lily the glass of milk with the fatal drop in it, and poison her off himself. He should, if he stayed long enough.

It was all very fine in thought to hector it in this fashion. But before the hearth still stood Anthony Gainsborough, repeating, in his inexorable voice,

'You will, however, let me know why you broke your promise to this girl, that she should see her lover.'

Maud tried repeating word for word the same answer she had given before. In vain.

Maud tried putting the same answers into other words. In vain.

Maud tried framing other answers of different clever kinds. In vain.

Still the cold, inexorable voice insisted in the same words:

'Why did you break the promise you gave the girl that she should see her lover?'

And the widow who, when she was groundlessly frightened, was on her guard, now that she had emerged from her fears, did not remark the peril into which the cold, insisting voice was pushing her.

At last Anthony Gainsborough seemed to tire, and the widow was glad of it. This ceaselessly reiterated demand hammering at her ears was beginning to make her stupid.

Anthony Gainsborough walked from the hearth to the window, and looked

out at the lawn and the sky. Then he came back.

'You do not choose,' he said, 'to answer my question with anything but excuses. When I came down here, I imagined that you had been simply very cruel. You have made me suspect that the case is graver by far. There is only one explanation of your conduct left. You have some reason for keeping people from seeing Miss Hardwick. I am going to know what it is.'

Maud Gainsborough winced. This was a sudden turn of affairs which she had not contemplated, whilst framing excuse after excuse. But though the situation had, in an instant, taken a much more serious aspect, she could face the accusation, and she did.

'I have no reason for keeping people

from seeing my cousin,' she said, quietly, and cautiously too. After all, this was not a man to trifle with. 'Numbers of people have seen her. The doctor will be here in a few minutes, and will tell you so. If she should recover consciousness, she will tell you so herself.'

'You have let whom you chose see her, and whom you chose you have kept away, that is to say,' replied Anthony Gainsborough.

After a pause he added,

'I shall see her myself.'

And after another pause,

'And, after I have seen her, I shall have the house searched.'

For a minute the widow believed everything lost. Anthony Gainsborough's first statement, that he would himself see her

cousin, filled her with inordinate misgiving of what the consequences might be; his second, that he would search the house, gave her a sensation of the earth opening under her feet, and she turned to the colour of ashes—and Essie noticed it. But it was for a moment only. The next instant, a revulsion, more sudden even than her dismay, gave her a little new assurance. The extremity of the situation had inspired her imagination with a device. Want of imaginative inventiveness was not among her failings. Now, after all, she believed she might save herself.

Looking up, she said, firmly,

'You have no authority to search my house, Anthony; and I shall not permit it. There is a limit to the insults that even I can endure.' And she rose from

her seat and confronted him. 'I will not have my house searched.'

'The house is not your house, but my house,' answered Anthony Gainsborough. 'You pay me no rent, and I pay the rates and taxes. The house is my house, and the furniture is my furniture; and I shall search my house, and smash anything you do not choose to unlock.'

'Search, then!' said Maud, sitting down again. Looking round, she asked, in a petulant voice, 'Do you want to see Miss Hardwick?'

'I am going to see her.'

'Am I to come with you?'

'No. I prefer to go alone. Where is she?'

'In the best bed-room.'

He turned to Essie,

'You will stay with Mrs. Gainsborough.

Ah, by the way, I have not introduced you. My niece, Miss Essie Chesterfield, Mrs. George Gainsborough.'

The two women bent their heads to each other without moving from their seats, and Anthony Gainsborough left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT was what Maud Gainsborough had reckoned on.

It was a feeble chance. But within the last half-hour she had passed through a variety of mental phases so numerous, so opposite, so rapid, and often so unexpected that she appeared to herself to be moving in a dream. Only half-an-hour since in the dining-room she was tasting the quiet security of a certain triumph, of a safe release, and, since then, there had succeeded fear, fear so abject, hope, desperation, relief, stupefaction, agony, se-

curity, desperation, courage, new fears, new desperation, and sudden reassurance, revulsion upon revulsion, till she hardly knew whether her judgment was speaking her the truth or not: only that she believed she saw a chance of evasion, and was going to avail herself of it.

The plan had burst upon her in a moment, at the very instant when she cowered under the conviction that everything was lost; after Anthony Gainsborough said that he would search the house.

What had suddenly struck her at that instant was this. That should he go to see Lily first, and commence his search afterwards, there would be the moment of his absence, during which she might contrive an opportunity to abstract the bottle of aconite from the drawer of the escritoire.

How easily, she reflected, she might have done that an hour earlier. How easily have taken the bottle from its hiding-place, have carried it down the garden and flung it into the sea. But half-an-hour ago and now were different times. Then the absoluteness of her security and of her successfulness almost transcended belief. Now it was a question whether a perilous expedient, whether the events of a few critical seconds, would allow her to snatch the only chance of escape from certain ruin.

She was resolved to risk the attempt.

As soon as the door had fairly closed behind her brother-in-law, she rose from her seat. It was not possible to say how soon Anthony Gainsborough might re-

turn, and only prompt action could save her.

'You will excuse my writing a note, Miss Chesterfield,' she said.

'Oh, certainly.'

The widow went across the room, and, taking her keys from her pocket, opened the old escritoire and sat down to write.

Essie's eyes followed her.

Unlocking a drawer Maud took out some note-paper. Then she rose, and going to the writing-table fetched the ink.

Essie observed the act. Evidently letters were usually written at the writing-table, and the widow's choosing to write at the escritoire had attracted her attention. Maud, too, had thought of this. But she had to risk it.

Sitting down, she began to write. When she had done she asked, with a curl of her lip,

'Do you wish, Miss Chesterfield, to see what I have written?'

'As I am left here to watch you I may as well,' replied Essie, with a coolness of effrontery for which Maud could willingly have boxed her ears.

Instead, however, leaning back in her chair, she offered the note for perusal.

Essie rose and took it. It was simply a request to the rector to pay her a ministerial visit.

'There can be no objection to your sending that,' said Essie, returning it.

And now for the critical moment.

Mrs. Gainsborough put her handkerchief down on her right, beside the note she had just written, and unlocked

another drawer. She was keeping her head cool, and her hands steady. She wished to prevent Essie from attaching any importance to the unlocking of the drawers. From the drawer she took out some envelopes. Then she lighted a little taper. Next to find the sealing-wax. There was none on the writing-table. She unlocked a drawer and rummaged it all over. Not there. The widow rose and opened another drawer. As she now stood, Essie Chesterfield could not see what she took out of the drawers, nor indeed whether she took anything out or not. And now. This was the drawer containing the bottle. She rummaged it over as she had done the others. Now she had the bottle in the hollow of her hand. Now it was under her handkerchief. And she locked

the drawer, and unlocked and rummaged another, the one in which she knew the sealing-wax to be.

'Ah: here's the sealing-wax,' she said, aloud, and sat down.

The bottle lay still under her handkerchief. Quite casually the widow looked round her. Essie was not regarding her. As a fact Essie had not seen what she had done.

Maud gave a sob, and took up her handkerchief, pretending to wipe her eyes, bending down over the table of the escritoire. She had the handkerchief in her left hand now, and the bottle in it. As she hung her head down, she unfastened the bosom of her dress with her right hand, and, as she again passed her hand before her face, let the bottle slip into the bosom of her dress.

A full minute elapsed before she ceased sobbing, with her head bent low, and her hands busy with her handkerchief, in such a way that she believed no one could see what she had been doing.

Then once more she wiped her eyes and raised herself, and proceeded to seal her letters. They might search the house now, if they liked.

She was saved! After all, saved! Essie had not turned nor spoken.

How cold the little bottle was against her breast! And how her heart throbbed! The strain of the moment of peril had almost overtaxed her. It was with an effort that she was keeping her hand steady whilst she proceeded to warm the wax, holding it in the flame of the taper.

'Ah!' A sudden start—the widow

drew her hands back—too late!—bang down came the revolving cover of the escritoire on her wrists.

With her step of a cat, Essie had come behind her whilst she was holding the wax in the flame, and, at the same instant that the widow saw her, slammed down the revolving lid.

It caught the widow's wrists in its wooden jaws like the teeth of a gin, making her give a scream of pain, in spite of herself.

'Scream! that is right, scream!' said Essie, holding down the lid by its two handles with all her might; 'they will come all the sooner.' And, raising her own voice, she called, 'Uncle Tony, Uncle Tony!'

For an explanation of her conduct, she said to the widow,

'I am certain that I saw you hiding something in your bosom.'

Quivering from head to foot, Maud Gainsborough sat breathing heavily, scarcely conscious in her mental agony, of the pain in her wrists.

Essie, still leaning with all her might, held the lid down mercilessly, and, as Anthony Gainsborough did not come, called again:

'Uncle Tony, Uncle Tony.'

The next instant the door opened, and Anthony Gainsborough strode into the room.

'Mrs. Gainsborough has something hidden in her bosom,' said Essie. 'You hold that handle, Uncle Tony, on that side, and I will take it out.'

With an 'Oh!' of desperation that rent the air of the room in a wail of agony, the

widow dropped her forehead on the lid of the escritoire.

And Essie, putting her hand into the bosom of her dress, drew out the bottle and handed it to her uncle, and took her other hand off the lid of the escritoire.

Anthony Gainsborough held up the bottle and read the label aloud. 'Aconite.' Above was in letters half-an-inch long, 'POISON.'

Essie saw them.

'See if she has any more about her,' said Anthony Gainsborough.

Essie searched the widow's pockets, and drew out the little phial.

'Have you any more elsewhere?' demanded Anthony Gainsborough.

'No,' gasped the widow.

Anthony Gainsborough removed his hands from the handle of the escritoire.

For a few seconds the widow remained motionless. Then, releasing her arms, she turned, and faced her foes. The edge of the escritoire had cut her wrists, and the blood trickled down on her hands. Turning away, she staggered to the sofa, and threw herself upon it with a wild cry,

'Oh, my God!'

Essie had stepped back to the escritoire, and stood leaning against it, pale and speechless, looking from her uncle to the widow, quivering with mental agony on the sofa—from the widow to her uncle.

Anthony Gainsborough crossed the room, and rang the bell.

'Is there a man-servant in the house?' he demanded of the housemaid.

'Yes, sir,' answered the girl, regarding with astonishment her mistress lying on the sofa.

'Send him to me.'

When the man came, he said, quietly,

'I want you to go at once to the police-station. I will give you a note to take with you. You can take my trap, which is waiting at the gate; and bring back the policeman with you in it.'

And he made a step to go towards the little writing-table.

But the widow had sprung from the sofa, and threw herself before him on her knees on the floor at his feet.

'No, Anthony, no, no!' she screamed. 'No, for God's sake, no! Not the police! I'll confess, I'll confess, Anthony: I'll confess everything. Don't send for the police! for pity's sake.'

And she literally grovelled on the ground before him.

'Why not?'

'No, Anthony, no! no!'

And, catching his arm, she held him with her blood-stained hands, her little wrists showing already discoloured and swollen.

'Anthony! Anthony!'

Anthony Gainsborough turned to the man.

'Go into the hall, and wait till I call you,' he said.

'No! Anthony, you must not send John! Not for the police,' cried the widow, as the door closed behind the man-servant. 'I'll confess, Anthony. I'll tell you everything. Indeed I will. Only don't give me to the police. Listen, Anthony,' she continued, still kneeling and clinging to his hand, as if she feared lest he should go to the table and write. 'I was tempted, I was tempted cruelly.

I'll tell you everything. I will, indeed, Anthony.'

She let his hand go, and he folded his arms, saying nothing, but looking down at her with a face of stone.

With her breast heaving convulsively, and her eyes anxiously watching his unmoved, impenetrable face, the widow went on, wildly, hurriedly,

'If I tell you everything, Anthony, you will spare me, won't you? I was tempted. Listen. I will tell you. I will confess everything—everything truly. Only, for God's sake, don't send for the police. Listen—Anthony. I found out—it was quite by an accident—that there is a great unclaimed fortune to which I am entitled. I am telling you the truth, indeed I am. I will show you all the proofs, if you like. And there

is only Lily Hardwick who has a claim to that fortune before me. And she knows nothing about it. Only Lily, Anthony, was between me and wealth, wealth such as I had never, till I found this out, dreamed of. I have known all about it ever so long: ever since I have had Lily with me, and before that. You understand me, Anthony, that I have known, all the time that Lily has been here, that she stood between me and a great fortune, and that if she died I should be rich, enormously rich. And I could easily have killed her, Anthony. But I never attempted it. I never thought of it. And you made dependence very bitter for me, Anthony: indeed you did. Many a woman in my place would have poisoned Lily long ago. And I could have done it easily,

I assure you I could. Only I did not: not until I was tempted. As I breathe, I am telling the truth.

'But I—I——'

She stopped short; but only for a few seconds.

'I will tell you everything—truly—I will indeed,' she went on, in an agonised voice, hanging her head as a hot blush flushed her cheek; 'I met a man I will not name. I could not help it, Anthony. He came here—I mean to Lynham. And, the moment I saw him, I knew what would happen. I knew that I should love him. One cannot help loving. But I wrote to you to let me go away from here, because I did not want to love him. And you would not let me go. It is all as much your fault as mine, Anthony. If you would have let

me go, none of this would have happened. But you would not let me go. And then it all turned out as I knew it would, and I loved him—I love him now, passionately, passionately!

'And, Anthony! I did it for his sake.

'Listen to what I tell you: I did it for his sake.'

She looked into his face to see if she had touched him at all. But his face was impassive.

'I swear to you, Anthony, that I did this thing for that man's sake. I swear it to you by God in heaven. Not for my sake, but for his sake. I would not have done it for my own sake. I would have remained poor. I did it for his sake. Not that he knew of it. I should never have told him of it. He would not have understood me.

'He is poor. Do you see? Too poor to marry me—and I too poor to marry him. I do not tell you who he is. It makes no difference who he is. But I tell you I loved him passionately, passionately, and if I had that fortune—he would come to me—and love me as I love him.

'And then, listen. This was what tempted me. It was so easy.

'Lily was ill. You know she was ill.

'And she was unhappy, too.

'Mr. Warrington came here, and she fell in love with him. And he would not notice her, and she fretted and pined for him, and fell ill.

'And I loved the man I tell you of so; and I wanted the money so much to offer him, and sometimes I thought Lily would die. I did think it. And I thought it

would be only a little sooner, or a little later.

'And she was so unhappy, too, so miserable. She fretted and pined so; and said that she wished she was dead. And, Anthony, could I help thinking, if she were dead, how happy, how happy, I and the man I loved would be?

'Anthony, was I not tempted? You won't send for the police? Don't you see how I was tempted? And that is not all. You have not heard all. There were other things that made it easier. Ah, Anthony, you don't know what the temptation is when the thing is easy. Lily was ill, and I knew that she would only seem to get a little worse, and a little worse. And I happened to have the aconite—by an accident: quite by an accident. It lay in my way, you see. And I knew that

Dr. Gregg was ignorant, and would not suspect anything. Do you see how I was tempted? Was it strange that I yielded? Anthony, would it not have been stranger if I had been able to resist—when it was so easy? And then, when I began giving her the aconite, she was only a little worse and a little worse: and nobody thought anything of it. They all made it easy for me to poison her. They did indeed, Anthony. If they had not, I should not have dared to go on. It was as much their fault as mine, because they all made it easy for me.

'Do you see how I was tempted? You won't send for the police? Don't you see, I had only to give Lily just one little drop once or twice a day. It was so simple. And I knew that she trusted me, that she loved me, and would never suspect any-

thing. If she had suspected me, Anthony, I could not have done it. But, like all the rest, she made it easy for me, and tempted me. It was as much her fault as mine. If she had not trusted me, I would not have attempted it.

'And, Anthony, I was not heartless, as you said. I hated to see her suffer, as she did. Indeed I did. But how could I help it? If I had had anything else that I could have used, anything that would have distressed her less, I would gladly have used it, but I had nothing. It was not my wish that the stuff should make her suffer. I swear to you, Anthony, that it went to my heart to see how the aconite tortured her. And I had to steel myself to give it her, and not to give way to my feelings, or I could not have gone on. I have not been heartless, Anthony.

'And, after all, I have done nothing. Lily has had some pain, but even now she will probably recover. And if she recovers, as she probably will, what have I done that you should want to be cruel, and to have me punished?

'And there is another thing. It was not only so easy, but, you see, it seemed to matter so little. Lily had no father, nor mother, nor sisters, nor brothers, nor relations of any kind; no one but me belonging to her in all the whole world. If she had had friends and relations, I would not have done it; Anthony, I vow to you I would not. I would have hesitated to pain them by her death. But, you see, she was all alone, without any friends; quite alone. And, when I thought of my great love, it seemed so little to take one life, only one—one little, lonely life that

nobody cared about. Anthony, see how I was tempted! You won't send for the police?'

She had done, and, with her hands clasped, she bent towards him, looking into his immoveable face as he stood with his hands folded before him.

'You devil!'

That was all he said, and turned to the writing-table.

The widow started up from the floor, and rushed to him, catching his arm.

'Anthony! you are not going to write for the police, after all? Not after what I have told you—Anthony!'

'What do you suppose I am going to do, then?'

And, scribbling off a few lines, he shouted,

'John!'

The man came in, and Anthony tossed him the note, saying,

'To the police-station, and quick.'

A moment Maud Gainsborough stood still, whilst her eyes swept round the room, and an inarticulate cry came from her lips parted in horror, and then she staggered to the sofa and flung herself down on her face with a wild shriek of despair.

Anthony Gainsborough rose from the table, perfectly unmoved, and went towards Essie, who stood leaning against the wall horror-struck and shuddering.

'Oh, Uncle Tony!' she exclaimed, in a tone of consternation.

Her uncle put his hand on her shoulder and took her to the open window.

'You will not forget what you have heard?' he said.

'Forget! Would it be possible to forget!' said the girl, sinking into a chair by the window.

Anthony Gainsborough left her and crossed to the sofa.

'I have something to say to you,' he said, touching the widow on the shoulder.

And, as she rose trembling, he added,

'Come with me.'

He led the way to the dining-room, and Maud followed him, wondering to herself whether he was, after all, going to give her a chance of escape.

In the dining-room he pointed to a chair by the table, and she sat down.

Again he folded his arms, as he had done in the drawing-room, and then fixing his eyes on hers, asked,

'You poisoned your husband?'

'If I tell you—will you let me go?' gasped Maud Gainsborough.

But Anthony Gainsborough only repeated his question,

'You poisoned him, with that same aconite?'

The widow hung her head. Of what use to deny it? Perhaps confession might earn her some mercy. Almost inaudibly, she answered,

'Yes.'

Placing the little phial he had taken from her on the table before her, Anthony Gainsborough said,

'You can lock the door. You understand?'

Maud looked at him, pale as ashes.

'No,' she said, in a hollow voice.

'No? You know what is in that bottle.'

The widow looked up defiantly.

'If I *won't* understand?'

'The police will be here in a quarter-of-an-hour.'

And he walked out of the room.

In the hall he stopped to listen.

The key turned in the lock of the dining-room door behind him.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SINGLE flat slab of white marble—nameless and dateless—in a lonely corner of the little churchyard at Lynham, covers a grave over which no prayers of the dead were said.

The spring sun gleamed upon it brightly as Frank Warrington, with his young wife on his arm, made their way towards it, past many other graves.

They had come home from the Continent only yesterday, Lily completely recovered, and without a trace on her beautiful face

of the peril through which she had passed.

In her hand she carried a wreath of white flowers, which, when they reached the lonely slab, she put down upon it.

'Poor Maud!' she said, leaning on her husband's arm, and dashing a tear from her eyes. 'Ah, Frank, I would give all my big fortune to have her back again. You have not forgiven her, Frank, for trying to poison me. I suppose you never will. And I know I should find it hard to forgive anyone who tried to injure you. But I—I loved Maud. I loved her up to the hour that she died, and afterwards—one could not bear malice against the dead: and I shall love her always.' Bending, she put her hand gently on the marble slab, and said, 'I hope you have

been forgiven, dear, as I have forgiven you.'

Stepping back, but still looking at the stone, she asked,

'Frank, do you ever wonder who *he* was?'

'He? Who?'

'That man. The man whom poor Maud met, and fell in love with in a moment: for whose sake she wished to get the fortune that she might marry him. I *do* wonder who he was.'

'I don't believe that there was ever any such person. That was all a fabrication, a story invented in the forlorn hope of persuading Mr. Gainsborough to have the poisoning hushed up.'

Lily shook her head.

'No, Frank. There was some one. I could give you quite a little history about

him. At the time, I thought nothing about it; but afterwards, after poor Maud had destroyed herself, and Mr. Gainsborough told me all that she had said, when I began to question my memory, I recollected a number of things. There was some one. And he must have come to Lynham about the time that I was laid up with that bad cold I had after our adventure on the beach. Maud must have met him on some occasion when she was out, whilst I was unable to leave the house. Immediately afterwards, when I was well again, I noticed a change in her. She was anxious and nervous. And then they either met again, or she heard something that was satisfactory, for she became more like herself. Afterwards, things went wrong. At that date, she was never the same for two days together; but sometimes

in the highest spirits, and then again unhappy, and then thinking, thinking for hours together, and strange and absent. I think that it must have been about that time that he proposed, and that they found they could not afford to marry. Afterwards, Maud became more like herself again, and was very, very kind to me—that was when you and I had quarrelled—and then I fell ill. And that was, of course, when she began giving me poison. If she had only told me about the fortune, I would gladly have shared it with her, and that would have been quite fair; fairer than that I should have it all, because it was she who was clever enough to find it out, and to get all the papers together. And there would still have been more than enough for you and me, dear. But I do wonder who he was. He must have

been a man out of the common. Maud could not have loved a man who had not something in him. And, I believe, he had dark hair, because of a remark she made to me about dark-haired men. And, somehow, I have a suspicion that he loved her much less than she loved him. So few people come to Lynham, that one ought to be able to find him out easily. But I hate to ask people about anything relating to Maud: they speak so bitterly of her; and it makes my heart ache. I wonder what he has thought of it all, and whether he will ever come to see her grave. I should like him to do that—and to be very sorry.'

'You will never know who he was,' said Warrington. 'If there ever really was such a person. She has taken her secret with her.'

'Then she has taken with her the dearest

thing she had on earth,' said Lily, gently; and they turned to go home.

Anthony Gainsborough and the Chesterfield girls were at Lynhurst. They had come back from the Continent with Frank Warrington and his wife. After dinner, in the evening, whilst Violet was playing, Essie and Lily and Warrington and Eustace sat talking in a little group.

'Did you go to Mrs. Gainsborough's grave?' asked Essie.

'Yes.'

'Lily,' said Warrington, 'has been hoping that the unknown man, whoever he was, with whom Mrs. Gainsborough fell in love will pay it a visit. She thinks that he should.'

'Are you sure that he has not done so already?' asked Eustace.

Essie bent over, and whispered something to Lily, and she, turning to Eustace, asked,

'Eustace, you see everything that no one else sees: do you know who he was?'

Eustace answered, slowly,

'He did not care for her. But, if she had had money, he would have married her: at least, I used to think so.'

'But, who was he? Who was he?' demanded Essie and Lily at the same moment. 'You know!'

'Who was he? Why should I tell you?' answered Eustace, pensively. 'Are you sure that it would do you any good to know? If you had taken your secrets with you into another world, would you thank anyone for telling them here? Who was he? That no one will ever know.'

Rising, he went across the room to speak to Violet at the piano. And, as he went, he said to himself,

'These people who see, how blind they are!'

THE END.

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